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LUCILE.

LUCILE.

BY

OWEN MEREDITH,

AUTHOR OF "THE WANDERER," "CLYTEMNESTRA," ETC

"Why, let the stricken deer go weep,
The hart ungallèd play;
For some must watch, while some must sleep:
Thus runs the world away."

HAMLET.

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DEDICATION.

TO MY FATHER.

I DEDICATE to you a work, which is submitted to the public with a diffidence and hesitation proportioned to the novelty of the effort it represents. For in this poem I have abandoned those forms of verse with which I had most familiarized my thoughts, and have endeavoured to follow a path on which I could discover no footprints before me, either to guide or to warn.

There is a moment of profound discouragement which succeeds to prolonged effort; when, the labour which has become a habit having ceased, we miss the sustaining sense of its companionship, and stand, with a feeling of strangeness and embarrassment, before the abrupt and naked result. As regards myself, in the present instance, the force of all such sensations is increased by the circumstances to which I have referred. And in this moment of discouragement, and doubt, my heart instinctively turns to you, from whom it has so often sought, from whom it has never failed to receive, support.

I do not inscribe to you this book because it contains anything that is worthy of the beloved and honoured name with which I thus seek to associate it: nor yet because I would avail myself of a vulgar pretext to display in public an affection that is best honoured by the silence which it renders sacred.

Feelings only such as those with which, in days when there existed for me no critic less gentle than yourself, I brought to you my childish manuscripts; feelings only such as those which have, in later years, associated with your heart all that has moved or occupied my own — lead me once more to seek assurance from the grasp of that hand which has hitherto been my guide and comfort through the life I owe to you.

And as in childhood, when existence had no toil beyond the day's simple lesson, no ambition beyond the neighbouring approval of the night, I brought to you the morning's task for the evening's sanction, so now I bring to you this self-appointed task-work of maturer years; less confident, indeed, of your approval, but not less confident of your love; and anxious only to realize your presence between myself and the public, and to mingle with those severer voices to whose final sentence I submit my work the beloved and gracious accents of your own.

OWEN MEREDITH.

VIENNA, March, 1860.

LUCILE.

PART I. CANTO I.

I.

LETTER FROM THE COMTESSE DE NEVERS TO LORD ALFRED VARGRAVE.

'I HEAR from Bigorre you are there. I am told
'You are going to marry Miss Darcy. Of old,
'So long since you may have forgotten it now,
'(When we parted as friends, soon mere strangers to grow,)
'Your last words recorded a pledge — what you will —
'A promise — the time is now come to fulfil.
The letters I ask you, my lord, to return,
'I desire to receive from your hand. You discern
'My reasons, which, therefore, I need not explain.
'The distance to Serchon is short. I remain
'A month in these mountains. Miss Darcy, perchance,
'Will forego one brief page from the summer romance
'Of her courtship, and spare you one day from your place
'At her feet, in the light of her fair English face.
'I desire nothing more, and I trust you will feel
'I desire nothing much.
'Your friend always,
'LUCILE.'

II.

Now in May Fair, of course, — in the fair month of May —
When all things in abundance make London so gay;
When street-strawberries are sold, piled in pottles like sheaves,
And young ladies are sold for the strawberry-leaves;
When cards, invitations, and three-corner'd notes
Fly about like white butterflies — gay little motes
In the sunbeam of Fashion; and even Blue-Books
Take a heavy-wing'd flight, and grow busy as rooks;
And the postman (that Genius, indifferent and stern,
Who shakes out even-handed to all, from his urn,
Those lots which so often decide if our day
Shall be fretful and anxious, or joyous and gay)
Brings, each morning, more letters of one sort or other
Than Cadmus himself put together, to bother
The heads of Hellenes, — I say, in the season
Of fair May in May Fair, there can be no reason
Why, when calmly absorbing your dry-toast and butter,
Your nerves should be suddenly thrown in a flutter
At the sight of a neat little letter, address'd
In a woman's handwriting, containing, half-guess'd,
An odour of violets faint as the spring,
And coquettishly sealed with a small signet-ring.

But in autumn, the season of sombre reflection,
When a damp day, at breakfast, begins with dejection;
Far from London and Paris, and ill at one's ease,
Away in the heart of the blue Pyrenees,
Where a call from the doctor, a stroll to the bath,

A ride through the hills on a hack like a lath,
A cigar, a French novel, a tedious flirtation,
Are all a man finds for his day's occupation,
The whole case, believe me, is totally changed,
And a letter may alter the plans we arranged
Over-night, for the slaughter of Time — a wild beast,
Which, though classified yet by no naturalist,
Abounds in these mountains, more hard to ensnare,
And more mischievous too, than the Lynx or the Bear.

III.

I marvel less, therefore, that, having already
Torn open this note, with a hand most unsteady,
Lord Alfred now dash'd it away with a cry
Of angry surprise. If a shell from the sky
On the board where he then sat at breakfast had bounded
And burst, he could scarcely have look'd more astounded,
Or more speedily spurn'd it.
The month is September;
Time, morning; the scene at Bigorre; (pray remember
These facts, gentle reader, because I intend
To fling all the unities by at the end.)
He walk'd to the window. The morning was chill:
The brown woods were crisp'd in the cold on the hill;
The sole thing abroad in the streets was the wind:
And the straws on the gust, like the thoughts in his mind,
Rose, and eddied around and around, as tho' teasing
Each other. The prospect, in truth, was unpleasing:
And Lord Alfred, whilst moodily gazing around it,
To himself more than once (vex'd in soul) sigh'd
. . . . . 'Confound it!'

IV.

What the thoughts may have been which this bad interjection
Disclosed, I must leave to the reader's detection;
For whatever they were, they were burst in upon,
As the door was burst through, by my lord's Cousin John.

COUSIN JOHN.

A fool, Alfred, a fool, a most motley fool!

LORD ALFRED.

Who?

COUSIN JOHN.

The man who has anything better to do;
And yet so far forgets himself, so far degrades
His position as Man, to this worst of all trades,
Which even a well-brought-up ape were above,
To travel about with a woman in love, —
Unless she 's in love with himself.

LORD ALFRED.

Indeed! why
Are you here then, dear Jack?

COUSIN JOHN.

Can't you guess it?

LORD ALFRED.

Not I

COUSIN JOHN.

Because I *have* nothing that 's better to do.
I had rather be bored, my dear Alfred, by you,
On the whole (I must own), than be bored by myself.
That perverse, imperturbable, golden-hair'd elf —
Your Will-o'-the-wisp — that has led you and me
Such a dance through these hills —

LORD ALFRED.

Who, Matilda?

COUSIN JOHN.

Yes! she,
Of course! who but she could contrive so to keep
One's eyes, and one's feet too, from falling asleep
For even one half-hour of the long twenty-four?

LORD ALFRED.

What 's the matter?

COUSIN JOHN.

Why, she is — a matter, the more
I consider about it, the more it demands
An attention it does not deserve; and expands
Beyond the dimensions which ev'n crinoline,
When possess'd by a fair face and saucy Eighteen,
Is entitled to take in this very small star,
Already too crowded, as *I* think, by far.
You read Malthus and Sadler?

LORD ALFRED.

Of course.

COUSIN JOHN.

To what use,
When you countenance, calmly, such monstrous abuse
Of one mere human creature's legitimate space
In this world? Mars, Apollo, Virorum! the case
Wholly passes my patience.

LORD ALFRED.

My own is worse tried.

COUSIN JOHN.

Yours, Alfred?

LORD ALFRED.

Read this, if you doubt, and decide

COUSIN JOHN (*reading the letter*).

'*I hear from Bigorre you are there. I am told*
'*You are going to marry Miss Darcy. Of old—*'
What is this?

LORD ALFRED.

Read it on to the end, and you 'll know

COUSIN JOHN (*continues reading*).

'*When we parted, your last words recorded a vow—*
'*What you will*' . . .
Hang it! this smells all over, I swear,
Of adventures and violets. Was it your hair
You promised a lock of?

LORD ALFRED.

Read on. You 'll discern

COUSIN JOHN (*continues*).

'*Those letters I ask you, my lord, to return.*' . . .
Humph! . . . Letters! . . . the matter is worse than I guess'd.
I have my misgivings—

LORD ALFRED.

Well, read out the rest,
And advise.

COUSIN JOHN.

Eh? . . . Where was I? . . .

(*continues*)

'*Miss Darcy perchance*
'*Will forego one brief page from the summer romance*
'*Of her courtship.*' . . .

Egad! a romance, for my part,
I'd forego every page of, and not break my heart!

LORD ALFRED.

Continue!

COUSIN JOHN (*reading*).

And spare you one day from your place
'At her feet.' . . .
Pray forgive me the passing grimace.
I wish you had MY place!

(*reads*)

'I trust you will feel
'I desire nothing much. Your friend' . . .
Bless me! *'Lucile'*?
The Comtesse de Nevers?

LORD ALFRED.

Yes.

COUSIN JOHN.

What will you do?

LORD ALFRED.

You ask me just what I would rather ask you.

COUSIN JOHN.

You can't go.

LORD ALFRED.

I must.

COUSIN JOHN.

And Matilda?

LORD ALFRED.

Oh, that
You must manage!

COUSIN JOHN.

Must I? I decline it, though, flat.
In an hour the horses will be at the door,
And Matilda is now in her habit. Before
I have finish'd my breakfast, of course I receive
A message for '*dear Cousin John!*' . . . I must leave
At the jeweller's the bracelet which *you* broke last night;
I must call for the music. 'Dear Alfred is right:
'The black shawl looks best: *will* I change it? of course
'I can just stop, in passing, to order the horse.
'Then Beau has the mumps, or St. Hubert knows what;
'*Will* I see the dog-doctor?' Hang Beau! I will *not*.

LORD ALFRED.

Tush, tush! this is serious.

COUSIN JOHN.

It is.

LORD ALFRED.

Very well,
You must think —

COUSIN JOHN.

What excuse will you make tho?

LORD ALFRED.

Oh, tell
Mrs. Darcy that . . . lend me your wits, Jack! . . . the deuce!
Can you not stretch your genius to fit a friend's use?
Excuses are clothes which, when ask'd unawares,

Good Breeding to naked Necessity spares.
You must have a whole wardrobe, no doubt.

COUSIN JOHN.

My dear fellow,
Matilda is jealous, you know, as Othello.

LORD ALFRED.

You joke.

COUSIN JOHN.

I am serious. Why go to Serchon?

LORD ALFRED.

Don't ask me. I have not a choice, my dear John.
Besides, shall I own a strange sort of desire,
Before I extinguish forever the fire
Of youth and romance, in whose shadowy light
Hope whisper'd her first fairy tales, to excite
The last spark, till it rise, and fade far in that dawn
Of my days where the twilights of life were first drawn
By the rosy, reluctant auroras of Love:
In short, from the dead Past the grave-stone to move;
Of the years long departed forever to take
One last look, one final farewell; to awake
The Heroic of youth from the Hades of joy,
And once more be, though but for an hour, Jack — a boy!

COUSIN JOHN.

You had better go hang yourself.

LORD ALFRED.

No! were it but
[redacted]at the Past from the Future is

It were worth the step back. Do you think we
should live
With the living so lightly, and learn to survive
That wild moment in which to the grave and its
gloom
We consign'd our heart's best, if the doors of the
tomb
Were not lock'd with a key which Fate keeps for
our sake?
If the dead could return, or the corpses awake?

COUSIN JOHN.

Nonsense! nonsense!

LORD ALFRED.

Not wholly. The man who gets up
A fill'd guest from the banquet, and drains off his
cup,
Sees the last lamp extinguish'd with cheerfulness,
goes
Well contented to bed, and enjoys its repose.
But he who hath supp'd at the tables of kings,
And yet starved in the sight of luxurious things;
Who hath watch'd the wine flow, by himself but
half tasted,
Heard the music, and yet miss'd the tune; who
hath wasted
One part of life's grand possibilities;—friend,
That man will bear with him, be sure, to the end,
A blighted experience, a rancour within:
You may call it a virtue, I call it a sin.

COUSIN JOHN.

I see you remember that cynical story
Of the wicked old profligate fellow — a hoary
Lothario, whom dying, the priest by his bed
(Knowing well the unprincipled life he had led,
And observing, with no small amount of surprise,
Resignation and calm in the [illegible]on, by [illegible]r's eyes)

Ask'd if he had nothing that weigh'd on his mind:
'Well, . . . no,' . . . says Lothario, 'I think not.
I find,
'On reviewing my life, which in most things was
pleasant,
I never neglected, when once it was present,
'An occasion of pleasing myself. On the whole,
'I have nought to regret'; . . . and so, smiling,
his soul
Took its flight from this world.

LORD ALFRED.

Well, Regret or Remorse,
Which is best?

COUSIN JOHN.

Why, Regret.

LORD ALFRED.

No; Remorse, Jack, of course;
For the one is related, be sure, to the other.
Regret is a spiteful old maid: but her brother,
Remorse, though a widower certainly, yet
Has been wed to young Pleasure. Dear Jack,
hang Regret!

COUSIN JOHN.

Bref! you mean, then, to go?

LORD ALFRED.

Bref! I do.

COUSIN JOHN.

One word . . . stay
Are you really in love with Matilda?

LORD ALFRED.

Love, eh.
What a question for [illegible] of course.

COUSIN JOHN.

Were you really in love
With Madame de Nevers?

LORD ALFRED.

What; Lucile? No, by Jove,
Never *really*.

COUSIN JOHN.

She 's pretty?

LORD ALFRED.

Decidedly so.
At least, so she was, some ten summers ago.
As pale as an evening in autumn — with hair
Neither black, nor yet brown, but that tinge which the air
Takes at eve in September, when night lingers lone
Through a vineyard, from beams of a slow-setting sun.
Eyes — the wistful gazelle's; the fine foot of a fairy;
And a hand fit a fay's wand to wave, — white and airy;
A voice soft and sweet as a tune that one knows,
Something in her there was set you thinking of those
Strange backgrounds of Raphael . . . that hectic and deep
Brief twilight in which southern suns fall asleep.

COUSIN JOHN.

Coquette?

LORD ALFRED.

Not at all. 'T was her one fault. Not she!
I had loved her the better, had she less loved me.
The heart of a man 's like that delicate weed
Which requires to be trampled on, boldly indeed,

Ere it give forth the fragrance you wish to extract.
'T is a simile, trust me, if not new, exact.

COUSIN JOHN.

Women change so.

LORD ALFRED.

Of course.

COUSIN JOHN.

And, unless rumor errs,
I believe that, last year, the Comtesse de Nevers *
Was at Baden the rage — held an absolute court
Of devoted adorers, and really made sport
Of her subjects.

LORD ALFRED.

Indeed!

COUSIN JOHN.

When she broke off with you
Her engagement, her heart did not break with it?

LORD ALFRED.

Pooh!
Pray would you have had her dress always in black,
And shut herself up in a convent, dear Jack?
Besides, 't was my fault the engagement was broken.

* O, Shakespeare! how couldst thou ask 'What 's in a name?
'T is the devil 's in it, when a bard has to frame
English rhymes for alliance with names that are French:
And in these rhymes of mine, well I know that I trench
All too far on that license which critics refuse,
With just right, to accord to a well-brought-up Muse.
Yet, tho' faulty the union, in many a line,
'Twixt my British-born verse and my French heroine,
Since, however auspiciously wedded they be,
There is many a pair that yet cannot agree,
Your forgiveness for this pair, the author invites,
Whom necessity, not inclination, unites.

COUSIN JOHN

I dare say. How was that?

LORD ALFRED.

O, the tale is soon spoken.
She bored me. I show'd it. She saw it. What next?
She reproach'd. I retorted. Of course she was vex'd.
I was vex'd that she was so. She sulk'd. So did I.
If I ask'd her to sing, she look'd ready to cry.
I was contrite, submissive. She soften'd. I harden'd.
At noon I was banish'd. At eve I was pardon'd.
She said I had no heart. I said she had no reason.
I swore she talk'd nonsense. She sobb'd I talk'd treason.
In short, my dear fellow, 't was time, as you see,
Things should come to a crisis, and finish. 'T was she
By whom to that crisis the matter was brought.
She released me. I linger'd. I lingered, she thought,
With too sullen an aspect. This gave me, of course,
The occasion to fly in a rage, mount my horse,
And declare myself uncomprehended. And so
We parted. The rest of the story you know.

COUSIN JOHN.

No, indeed.

LORD ALFRED.

Well, we parted. Of course we could not
Continue to meet, as before, in one spot.
You conceive it was awkward? Even Don Ferdinando
Can do, you remember, no more than he can do.
I think that I acted exceedingly well,
Considering the time when this rupture befel,
For Paris was charming just then. It deranged

All my plans for the winter. I ask'd to be changed—
Wrote for Naples, then vacant — obtain'd it — and so
Joined my new post at once; but scarce reach'd it, when lo!
My first news from Paris informs me Lucile
Is ill, and in danger. Conceive what I feel.
I fly back. I find her recover'd, but yet
Looking pale. I am seized with a contrite regret.
I ask to renew the engagement.

COUSIN JOHN.

And she?

LORD ALFRED.

Reflects, but declines. We part, swearing to be
Friends ever, friends only. All that sort of thing;
We each keep our letters. . . . a portrait . . . a ring . . .
With a pledge to return them whenever the one
Or the other shall call for them back.

COUSIN JOHN.

Pray go on.

LORD ALFRED.

My story is finish'd. Of course I enjoin
On Lucile all those thousand good maxims we coin
To supply the grim deficit found in our days,
When Love leaves them bankrupt. I preach. She obeys.
She goes out in the world; takes to dancing once more —
A pleasure she rarely indulged in before.
I go back to my post, and collect (I must own
'T is a taste I had never before, my dear John)
Antiques and small Elzevirs. Heigho! now, Jack,
You know all.

COUSIN JOHN (*after a pause*).

You are really resolved to go back?

LORD ALFRED.

Eh, where?

COUSIN JOHN.

To that worst of all places — the past.
You remember Lot's wife?

LORD ALFRED.

'T was a promise when last
We parted. My honour is pledged to it.

COUSIN JOHN.

Well,
What is it you wish me to do?

LORD ALFRED.

You must tell
Matilda, I meant to have call'd — to leave word —
To explain — but the time was so pressing —

COUSIN JOHN.

My lord,
Your lordship's obedient! I really can't do . . .

LORD ALFRED.

You wish then to break off my marriage?

COUSIN JOHN.

No, no
But indeed I can't see why yourself you need take
These letters.

LORD ALFRED.

Not see? would you have me, then, break
A promise my honour is pledged to?

COUSIN JOHN (*humming*)

'*Off, off,*
'*And away! said the stranger*' . . .

LORD ALFRED.

Oh, good! oh, you scoff!

COUSIN JOHN.

At what, my dear Alfred?

LORD ALFRED.

At all things!

COUSIN JOHN.

Indeed?

LORD ALFRED.

Yes! I see that your heart is as dry as a reed.
You 're a *blasé* unprincipled *roué*. I see
You have no feeling left in you, even for me!
At honour you jest; you are cold as a stone
To the warm voice of friendship. Belief you have none;
You have lost faith in all things. You carry a blight
About with you everywhere. Yes, at the sight
Of such callous indifference who could be calm?
I must leave you at once, Jack, or else the last balm
That is left me in Gilead you 'll turn into gall.
Heartless, cold, unconcern'd . . .

COUSIN JOHN.

Have you done? Is that all?
Well, then, listen to me! I presume when you made
Up your mind to propose to Miss Darcy, you weigh'd

All the drawbacks against the equivalent gains,
Ere you finally settled the point. What remains
But to stick to your choice? You want money: 't is here.
A settled position: 't is yours. A career:
You secure it. A wife, young, and pretty as rich,
Whom all men will envy you. Why must you itch
To be running away on the eve of all this
To a woman whom never for once did you miss
All these years since you left her? Who knows what may hap?
This letter — to *me* — is a palpable trap.
The woman has changed since you knew her. Perchance
She yet seeks to renew her youth's broken romance.
When women begin to feel youth and their beauty
Slip from them, they count it a sort of a duty
To let nothing else slip away unsecured
Which these, while they lasted, might once have procured.
Lucile 's a coquette to the end of her fingers,
I will stake my last farthing. Perhaps the wish lingers
To recall the once reckless, indifferent lover
To the feet he has left: let intrigue now recover
What truth could not keep. 'T were a vengeance, no doubt —
A triumph; — but why must *you* bring it about?
You are risking the substance of all that you schemed
To obtain; and for what? some mad dream you have dream'd!

Lord Alfred.

But there 's nothing to risk. You exaggerate, Jack.
You mistake. In three days, at the most, I am back.

Cousin John.

Ay, but how? . . . discontented, unsettled, upset,
Bearing with you a comfortless twinge of regret;
Preoccupied, sulky, and likely enough
To make your *Fiancée* break off in a huff.
Three days do you say? But in three days who knows
What may happen? I don't, nor do you, I suppose.

V.

Of all the good things in this good world around us,
The one most abundantly furnish'd and found us,
And which, for that reason, we least care about,
And can best spare our friends, is good counsel, no doubt.
But advice, when 't is sought from a friend (tho' civility
May forbid to avow it), means mere liability
In the bill we already have drawn on Remorse,
Which we deem that a true friend is bound to endorse.
A mere lecture on debt from that friend is a bore.
Thus, the better his cousin's advice was, the more
Alfred Vargrave with angry resentment opposed it.
And, having the worst of the contest, he closed it
With so firm a resolve his bad ground to maintain,
That, sadly perceiving resistance was vain,
And argument fruitless, the amiable Jack
Came to terms, and assisted his cousin to pack
A slender valise (the one small condescension
Which his final remonstrance obtain'd) whose dimension
Excluded large outfits; and, cursing his stars, he
Shook hands with his friend and return'd to Miss Darcy.

VI.

Lord Alfred, when last to the window he turn'd,
Ere he lock'd up and quitted his chamber, discern'd
Matilda ride by, with her cheek beaming bright
In what Virgil has called 'Youth's purpureal light'
(I like the expression, and can't find a better).
He sigh'd as he look'd at her. Did he regret her?
In her habit and hat, with her glad golden hair,
As airy and blithe as a blithe bird in air,
And her arch rosy lips, and her eager blue eyes,
With their little impertinent look of surprise,
And her round youthful figure, and fair neck, below
The dark drooping feather, as radiant as snow, —
I can only declare, that if *I* had the chance
Of passing three days in the exquisite glance
Of those eyes, or caressing the hand that now petted
That fine English mare, I should much have regretted
Whatever might lose me one little half-hour
Of a pastime so pleasant, when once in my power.
For, if one drop of milk from the bright Milky Way
Could turn into a woman, 't would look, I dare say,
Not more fresh than Matilda was looking that day.

VII.

But, whatever the feeling that prompted the sigh
With which Alfred Vargrave now watch'd her ride by,
I can only affirm that, in watching her ride,
As he turn'd from the window, he certainly sigh'd.

CANTO II.

I.

LETTER FROM LORD ALFRED VARGRAVE TO THE COMTESSE DE NEVERS.

'Bigorre, Tuesday.

'YOUR note, Madam, reach'd me to-day, at Bigorre,
'And commands (need I add) my obedience. Before
'The night I shall be at Serchon — where a line,
'If sent to Duval's, the hotel where I dine,
'Will find me, awaiting your orders. Receive
'My respects.
'Yours sincerely,
'A. VARGRAVE.
'I leave
In an hour.'

II.

In an hour from the time he wrote this,
Alfred Vargrave, in tracking a mountain abyss,
Gave the rein to his steed and his thoughts, and pursued,
In pursuing his course through the blue solitude,
The reflections that journey gave rise to.
And here,
Dear Reader, (for when was a reader not dear ?)
Let me pause to describe you my hero.

III.

We all
Have seen in the world, at an opera or ball,
Or read of in books, or heard sung of in songs,
Or encounter'd, perchance, 'mid the gay idle throngs

Whom at Baden or Homburg, at evening, one sees,
Lounging over green tables, or under green trees,
In the sound of the music, the light of the flambeaux,
Two kinds of Don Juan.
They are *Arcades ambo*
The one is Italian or French: a point, rather
Disputed: I think, tho', Molière was his father.
For the rest, of his family nothing is known.
Of his sponsors, 't is said that a croupier was one,
The other an actress at Paris: perchance
His life 's a libretto, his birth a romance.
But his name is Don Juan. Of that there 's no question.
He boasts a bold beauty. He owns a digestion
Æs triplex et robur, for lobsters and oysters;
The darling of grisettes, the terror of cloisters.
He is insolent, noisy, extravagant, vain.
On the whole, he is vulgar. But one thing is plain,
The women don't think him so. Would you know why?
His name is Don Juan.
We 'll let him pass by
Because he 's a quarrelsome fellow.

IV.

The other
Some persons have taken, I hear, for his brother.
But this, I believe, is an error.
Indeed,
If, though but for a moment, you 'll look with due heed
In the face of this so-call'd relation, you 'll see
That he springs from a different family tree.
In fact he is English. One cannot but know it;
His features, his manners, his conduct, all show it.
He belongs to a northern noblity, and
His sire was a Lovelace.
I think that George Sand
Must have met him and known him when, after the Peace,

He made the grand tour of the Continent. Greece,
Spain, Italy, Egypt, he ran them all through
While the down on his lip and his chin was yet new.
His classical reading is great: he can quote
Horace, Juvenal, Ovid, and Martial by rote.
He has read Metaphysics . . . Spinoza and Kant;
And Theology too: I have heard him descant
Upon Basil and Jerome. Antiquities, art,
He is fond of. He knows the old masters by heart,
And his taste is refined. I must own in this place
He is scarcely good-looking; and yet in his face
There is something that makes you gaze at it again.
You single him out from a room full of men,
And feel curious to know him. There 's that in his look
Which draws you to read in it, as in a book,
Of some cabalist, character'd curiously o'er
With an incomprehensible legended lore.
Relentless, and patient, and resolute, cold,
Unimpassion'd, and callous, and silently bold,
Whatever affords him pursuit is pursued
As a wild beast pursues, and devours his food
In the forest, impell'd by the instinct of prey.
You can scarcely despise, tho' abhor him you may;
For you feel, with a thrill, as you track through the world
The course of his destiny, snakily curl'd
In the roses, or branding with thunder the heath,
Some bad angel hath pass'd there. The Angel of Death,
Or Destruction, it may be.
So, leave him.

V

There are,
Here and there, in Life's great lazaretto, though rare,

Certain men whose disease of the heart is more
deep,
Though less deadly. Yet something there is makes
me weep
When I strive to describe them. I search, but in
vain,
For the words that should render the portraiture
plain.
Nine cycles with Dante my muse hath descended;
In the hollows of hell I have gather'd and blended
All hues of the pale, pulsing flamelight; and yet
The picture is vague as a virgin's regret,
And designs but a shadow, that wavers, and goes,
And returns, on the twilight of thought.
Such are those
Whom my verse would in vain comprehend. Alas!
they
Comprehend not themselves.
They are drawn off one way
By their passions, and drawn back again by their
heart;
A vague but immortal regret, with its dart,
Pursues them forever; and drives them with
pain
From themselves to the world, from the world back
again
To themselves.
Having fail'd at the springs they seek first
To satiate wholly the undying thirst
Of a deathless desire, they would quench it forever
In the dregs of a sensual opiate; — endeavour
To trample out that which is brightest in them,
The star that is set on their soul's diadem,
Because it has fail'd to enkindle in others
One spark from the glory which nothing quite
smothers:
For they cannot all stifle the spirit. At night
They reel home from the orgy beneath the wan
light

Of the star that reproachfully leads them. The world
In darkness and dream and oblivion is furl'd;
Their destiny stirs and awakes in them then.
While their cheek with the wine is yet flushing, these men
Arise, and the serpent and ape at their feet
Crouch and huddle. Their hair creeps. Their brow gathers heat
From some seraph that sadly regards them. They start,
Like a god from the clay, into beauty and art.
What breaks from the lip with such passionate strain?
Some wild song of the revel, re-echoed again?
Nay, hark! 't is the psalm of the soul, as her wings
Are unfurl'd:—'t is the Bard, 't is no drunkard, that sings!
Heaven opens. Earth yawns. Hell delivers its prey.
The beast and false prophet slink, baffled, away.
The world stands afar off to wonder or scoff—
The chariots of Israel, the horsemen thereof!
The spirit ascends through the heavenly portal,
And the mantle, descending, hath cover'd the mortal!

The man is a profligate sensualist,
The man's life a reckless debauch, you insist:
Let the man's life be all that you will, I appeal
The man's work is immortal—behold it and kneel!
But the life of the man? Can you tell where it lies?
In the effort to sink, or the power to rise?
Can you guess what the thirst is the man quenches thus?
In vain! shall we tell what he fails to tell us?

VI.

To this class my hero remotely belongs —
A class, doubtless, more common in life than in songs.
If genius he had not, at least he had much
That to genius is kindred: one feverish touch
Of that hunger which urges forever the soul
To some infinite, distant, impossible goal:
The horseleech's daughter that cries in the heart
With her ceaseless '*Give, give!*' and sits pining apart
From the purpose of all things.

VII.

The age is gone o'er
When a man may in all things be all. We have more
Painters, poets, musicians, and artists, no doubt,
Than the great Cinquecento gave birth to; but out
Of a million of mere dilettanti, when, when
Will a new LEONARDO arise on our ken?
He is gone with the age which begat him. Our own
Is too vast and too complex for one man alone
To embody its purpose, and hold it shut close
In the palm of his hand. There were giants in those
Irreclaimable days; but in these days of ours
In dividing the work we distribute the powers.
Yet a dwarf on a dead giant's shoulders sees more
Than the 'live giant's eyesight avail'd to explore;
And in life's lengthen'd alphabet what used to be
To our sires X Y Z is to us A B C.
A Varini is roasted alive for his pains,
But a Bacon comes after, and picks up his brains.

A Bruno is angrily seized by the throttle
And hunted about by thy ghost, Aristotle,
Till a More or Lavater step into his place,
Then the world turns, and makes an admiring grimace.
Once the men were so great and so few, they appear,
Through a distant Olympian atmosphere,
Like vast Caryatids upholding the age.
Now the men are so many and small, disengage
One man from the million to mark him, next moment
The crowd sweeps him hurriedly out of your comment;
And since we seek vainly (to praise in our songs)
'Mid our fellows the size which to heroes belongs,
We take the whole age for a hero, in want
Of a better; and still, in its favour, descant
On the strength and the beauty which, failing to find
In any one man, we ascribe to mankind.

VIII.

Alfred Vargrave was one of those men who achieve
So little because of the much they conceive.
A redundantly sensuous nature, each pore
Ever patent to beauty, had yet left him sore
With a sense of impossible power. He saw
Too keenly the void 'twixt the absolute law
And the partial attainment. He knock'd at each one
Of the doorways of life, and abided in none.
His course by each star that would cross it was set,
And whatever he did he was sure to regret.
That target, discuss'd by the travellers of old,
Which to one appear'd argent, to one appear'd gold,

To him, ever lingering on Doubt's dizzy margent,
Appear'd in one moment both golden and argent.
The man who seeks one thing in life, and but one,
May hope to achieve it before life be done;
But he who seeks all things, wherever he goes,
Only reaps from the hopes which around him he sows
A harvest of barren regrets. And the worm
That crawls on in the dust to the definite term
Of its creeping existence, and sees nothing more
Than the path it pursues till its creeping be o'er,
In its limited vision, is happier far
Than the Half-Sage, whose course, fix'd by no friendly star,
Is by each star distracted in turn, and who knows
Each will still be as distant wherever he goes.

IX.

Both brilliant and brittle, both bold and unstable,
Indecisive yet keen, Alfred Vargrave seem'd able
To dazzle, but not to illumine, mankind.
A vigorous, various, versatile mind;
A character wavering, fitful, uncertain,
As the shadow that shakes o'er a luminous curtain,
Vague and flitting, but on it for ever impressing
The shape of some substance at which you stand guessing:
When you said, 'All is worthless and weak here, behold!
Into sight on a sudden there seem'd to unfold
Great outlines of strenuous truth in the man:
When you said 'This is genius,' the outlines grew wan.
And his life, tho' in all things so gifted and skill'd,
Was, at best, but a promise which nothing fulfill'd.

X.

In the budding of youth, ere wild winds can deflower

The shut leaves of man's life, round the germ of man's power
Yet folded, his life had been earnest. Alas!
In that life one occasion, one moment, there was
When all that was earnest in him might have been
Unclosed into manhood's imperial, serene
Dominion of permanent power. But it found him
Too soon; ere the weight of the light life around him
Had been weigh'd at its worth; when his nature was still
The delicate toy of too pliant a will
The boisterous play of the world to resist,
Or the frost of the world's wintry wisdom.
He miss'd
That occasion, too rath in its advent.
Since then,
He had made it a law, in his commerce with men,
That intensity in him which only left sore
The heart it disturb'd to repel and ignore.

And thus, as some Prince by his subjects deposed,
Whose strength he, by seeking to crush it, disclosed,
In resigning the power he lack'd power to support,
Turns his back upon courts, with a sneer at the court,
In his converse this man for self-comfort appeal'd
To a cynic denial of all he conceal'd
In the instincts and feelings belied by his words.
Words, however, are things: and the man who accords
To his language the license to outrage his soul,
Is controll'd by the words he disdains to control.
And, therefore, he seem'd, in the deeds of each day,
The light code proclaim'd on his lips to obey;
And, the slave of each whim, follow'd wilfully aught

That perchance fool'd the fancy, or flatter'd the
thought.
Yet, indeed, deep within him, the spirits of truth,
Vast, vague aspirations, the powers of his youth,
Lived and breathed, and made moan — stirr'd
themselves — strove to start
Into deeds — tho' deposed, in that Hades, his heart.
Like those antique Theogonies ruin'd and hurl'd
Under clefts of the hills, which, convulsing the
world,
Heav'd, in earthquake, their heads the rent cav-
erns above,
To trouble at times in the light court of Jove
All its frivolous gods, with an undefined awe,
Of wrong'd rebel powers that own'd not their law.
Yes! still in his nature was more than enough
(Altho' self-disputed) of strong English stuff,
Which, had he been forced to some claim dis-
allow'd
By the world, to push firmly his path thro' that
crowd
Amidst which he now lounged, would have welded
in one
Earnest purpose the powers now conscious of none,
Because squander'd on many. And therefore, if
born
To some lowlier rank (from the world's languid
scorn
Secured by the world's stern resistance), where
strife,
Strife and toil, and not pleasure, gave purpose to
life,
He, no doubt, before this, would have lived to
attain
Not eminence only, but worth. So, again,
Had he been of his own house the first-born, each
gift
Of a mind many-gifted had gone to uplift
A great name by a name's greatest uses.

But there
He stood isolated, opposed, as it were,
To life's great realities; part of no plan;
And if ever a nobler and happier man
He might hope to become, that alone could be when
With all that is real in life and in men
What was real in him should have been reconciled;
When each influence now from his being exiled
Should have seized on his being, combined with his nature,
And form'd, as by fusion, a new human creature:
As when those airy elements viewless to sight
(The amalgam of which, if our science be right,
The germ of this populous planet doth fold)
Unite in the glass of the chemist, behold!
Where a void seem'd before, there a substance appears,
From the fusion of forces whence issued the spheres!

XI.

As it was, his chief fault was an unconscious awe
Of the little world, falsely call'd great, and the law
Of its lawless dictators; — an awe not indeed
Of that great world which justly on each human deed
Sits umpire, adjudging man's worth o'er man's grave,
Like those solemn Tribunals of Egypt, which gave
Or denied to her dead kings the tombs of the kings:
That grand court of Public Opinion, whence springs
Man's loyal allegiance to lofty control,
Which confines not his life, but concentrates his soul.

For obedience is nobler than freedom. What 's free ?
The vex'd straw on the wind, the froth'd spume on the sea :
The great ocean itself, as it rolls and it swells,
In the bonds of a boundless obedience dwells.
'*Ah, what will the world say?*' . . THE WORLD ! — therein lies
The question which, as it is utter'd, implies
All that 's fine or that 's feeble in thought and intent.
The distinction depends on the *world* that is meant.
Was it base, our own Nelson's life-cry for 'A place
In Westminster Abbey, and Victory' ? Base,
The Hero's last thought — 'Will men murmur my name
In Athens ?' Base ? no !
What is man's faith in fame,
But respect for the world's good opinion ?
What then ?
Is it noble (since man owes submission to men
As the judges of man) the Fop's query — 'Those cavillers
'And gossips, what say they of me at the Travellers',
'Or White's ?' Noble ? no !
Whence is faith weak in act,
But from fear of the world's false opinion ?

XII.

In fact,
Had Lord Alfred found that rare communion which links
With what woman feels purely, what man nobly thinks,
And by hallowing life's hopes, enlarges life's strength,
His shrewd tact had moulded and master'd at length

The world that now master'd and moulded his will.
An affluent sympathy, dexterous skill,
And prompt apprehension in him, would have saved
His life from the failures of those who have braved
The world, with no clew to its intricate plan,
And made him a great, and a practical man.
But the permanent cause why his life fail'd and miss'd
The full value of life was, — where man should resist
The world, which man's genius is call'd to command,
He gave way, less from lack of the power to withstand
Than from lack of the resolute will to retain
Those strongholds of life which the world strives to gain.
For let a man once show the world that he feels
Afraid of its bark, and 't will fly at his heels:
Let him fearlessly face it, 't will leave him alone:
But 't will fawn at his feet if he flings it a bone.

XIII.

The moon of September, now half at the full,
Was unfolding from darkness and dreamland the lull
Of the quiet blue air, where the many-faced hills
Watch'd, well-pleased, their fair slaves, the light, foam-footed rills,
Dance and sing down the steep marble stairs of their courts,
And gracefully fashion a thousand sweet sports.
Like ogres in council those mountains look'd down,
Impassive, each king in his purple and crown.
Lord Alfred (by this on his journeyings far)
Was pensively puffing his Lopez cigar,
And brokenly humming an old opera strain,
And thinking, perchance, of those castles in Spain

Which that long rocky barrier hid from his sight;
When suddenly, out of the darkness of night,
A horseman emerged from a fold of the hill,
And so startled his steed, that was winding at will
Up the thin dizzy strip of a pathway which led
O'er the mountain — the reins on its neck, and its head
Hanging lazily forward — that, but for a hand
Light and ready, yet firm, in familiar command,
Both rider and horse might have been in a trice
Hurl'd horribly over the grim precipice.

XIV.

As soon as the moment's alarm had subsided,
And the oath, with which nothing can find unprovided
A thoroughbred Englishman, safely exploded,
Lord Alfred unbent (as Apollo his bow did
Now and then) his erectness; and looking, not ruder
Than such inroad would warrant, survey'd the intruder,
Whose arrival so nearly cut short in his glory
My hero, and finish'd abruptly this story.

XV.

The stranger, a man of his own age or less,
Well mounted, and simple though rich in his dress,
Wore his beard and moustache in the fashion of France.
His face, which was pale, gather'd force from the glance
Of a pair of dark, vivid, and eloquent eyes.
With a gest of apology, touch'd with surprise,
He lifted his hat, bow'd, and courteously made
Some excuse in such well-cadenced French as betray'd,
At the first word he spoke, the Parisian.

XVI.

I swear
I have wander'd about in the world everywhere;
From many strange mouths have heard many strange tongues;
Strain'd with many strange idioms my lips and my lungs;
Walk'd in many a far land, regretting my own;
In many a language groan'd many a groan;
And have often had reason to curse those wild fellows
Who built the high house at which Heaven turn'd jealous,
Making human audacity stumble and stammer
When seized by the throat in the hard gripe of Grammar.
But the language of languages dearest to me
Is that in which once, *O ma toute chérie*,
When, together, we bent o'er your nosegay for hours,
You explain'd what was silently said by the flowers,
And, selecting the sweetest of all, sent a flame
Through my heart, as, in laughing, you murmur'd *je t'aime*.
O my Rosebud of Pæstum, whose bloom never dies!
Now dead on my bosom that dear flow'ret lies;
But the meaning you gave to it then cannot fade;
In my being it blooms, and its fragrance hath made
A garden within me, where memory strays,
Evermore, with faint footfalls, down blossoming ways.

XVII.

The Italians have voices like peacocks; the Spanish
Smell, I fancy, of garlic; the Swedish and Danish
Have something too Runic, too rough and unshod in
Their accent for mouths not descended from Odin

German gives me a cold in the head, sets me wheezing
And coughing; and Russian is nothing but sneezing;
But, by Belus and Babel! I never have heard,
And I never shall hear (I well know it), one word
Of that delicate idiom of Paris without
Feeling morally sure, beyond question or doubt,
By the wild way in which my heart inwardly flutter'd,
That my heart's native tongue to my heart had been utter'd.
And whene'er I hear French spoken as I approve,
I feel myself quietly falling in love.

XVIII.

Lord Alfred, on hearing the stranger, appeased
By a something, an accent, a cadence, which pleased
His ear with that pledge of good breeding which tells
At once of the world in whose fellowship dwells
The speaker that owns it, was glad to remark
In the horseman a man one might meet after dark
Without fear.
Not unfavorably thus impress'd,
As it seem'd, with each other, the two men abreast
Rode on slowly a moment.

XIX.

STRANGER.

I see, Sir, you are
A smoker. Allow me!

LORD ALFRED.

Pray take a cigar.

STRANGER.

Many thanks! . . . Such cigars are a luxury here.
Do you go to Serchon?

LORD ALFRED.

Yes; and you?

STRANGER.

Yes. I fear,
Since our road is the same, that our journey must be
Somewhat closer than is our acquaintance. You see
How narrow the path is. I 'm tempted to ask
Your permission to finish (no difficult task!)
The cigar you have given me (really a prize!)
In your company.

LORD ALFRED.

Charm'd, Sir, to find your road lies
In the way of my own inclinations! Indeed
The dream of your nation I find in this weed.
In the distant Savannahs a talisman grows
That makes all men brothers that use it . . . who knows?
That blaze which erewhile from the *Boulevart* outbroke,
It has ended where wisdom begins, Sir, — in smoke.
Messieurs Lopez (whatever your publicists write)
Have done more in their way human kind to unite
Than ten Prudhons perchance.
What a wonderful spot!
This air is delicious; the day was too hot.

STRANGER.

Ah, yes! did you chance scarce a half-hour ago
To remark that miraculous sunset?

LORD ALFRED.

Why, no

STRANGER.

All the occident, fused in one fierce conflagration,
Stream'd flame: and the hills, as in grim expectation,
Scarr'd and hoary stood round, like severe hierophants
When at some savage rite the red flame breathes and pants
And expands for a victim.

LORD ALFRED.

A very old trick!
One would think that the sun by this time must be sick
Of blushing with such a parade of disdain
For this frivolous world he enlightens in vain.
I see you're a poet.

STRANGER.

Who is not, alone
In these mountains? For me, though, I own I am none.
Man's life is but short, and the youth of a man
Is yet shorter. I wish to enjoy what I can.
A sunset, if only a sunset be near;
A moon such as this, if the weather be clear;
A good dinner, if hunger come with it; good wine,
If I'm thirsty; a fire, if I'm cold; and, in fine,
If a woman is pretty, to me 't is no matter,
Be she *blonde* or *brunette*, so she lets me look at her

LORD ALFRED.

I suspect that at Serchon, if rumour speak true,
Your choice is not limited.

STRANGER.

Yes. One or two
Of our young Paris ladies remain there, but yet
The season is over.

LORD ALFRED.

I almost forget
The place; but remember when last I was there,
I thought the best part of it then was the air
And the mountains.

STRANGER.

No doubt! all these baths are the same.
One wonders for what upon earth the world came
To seek, under all sorts of difficulties,
The very same things in the far Pyrenees
Which it fled from at Paris. Health, which is, no doubt,
The true object of all, not a soul talks about.
'T is a sort of religion.

LORD ALFRED.

You know the place well?

STRANGER.

I have been there two seasons.

LORD ALFRED.

Pray who is the Belle
Of the Baths at this moment?

STRANGER.

The same who has been
The belle of all places in which she is seen;
The belle of all Paris last winter; last spring
The belle of all Baden.

LORD ALFRED.

An uncommon thing!

STRANGER.

Sir, an uncommon beauty! . . . I rather should say,

An uncommon character. Truly, each day
One meets women whose beauty is equal to hers
But none with the charm of Lucile de Nevers.

LORD ALFRED.

Madame de Nevers!

STRANGER.

Do you know her?

LORD ALFRED.

I know
Or, rather, I knew her, — a long time ago.
I almost forget. . . .

STRANGER.

What a wit! what a grace
In her language! her movements! what play in her face!
And yet what a sadness she seems to conceal!

LORD ALFRED.

You speak like a lover.

STRANGER.

I speak as I feel,
But not like a lover. What interests me so
In Lucile, at the same time forbids me, I know,
To give to that interest, whate'er the sensation,
The name we men give to an hour's admiration,
A night's passing passion, an actress's eyes,
A dancing-girl's ankles, a fine lady's sighs.

LORD ALFRED.

Yes, I quite comprehend. But this sadness — this shade
Which you speak of? . . . it almost would make me afraid
Your gay countrymen, Sir, less adroit must have grown,

Since when, as a stripling, at Paris, I own
I found in them terrible rivals, — if yet
They have all lack'd the skill to console this regret
(If regret be the word I should use), or fulfil
This desire (if desire be the word), which seems still
To endure unappeased. For I take it for granted
From all that you say, that the will was not wanted

XX.

The stranger replied, not without irritation:
'I have heard that an Englishman — one of your
nation
'I presume — and if so, I must beg you, indeed,
'To excuse the contempt which I . . .'

LORD ALFRED.

Pray, Sir, proceed
With your tale. My compatriot, what was his
crime?

STRANGER.

Oh, nothing! His folly was not so sublime
As to merit that term. If I blamed him just now,
It was not for the sin, but the silliness.

LORD ALFRED.

How?

STRANGER.

I own I hate botany. Still, . . . I admit,
Although I myself have no passion for it,
And do not understand, yet I cannot despise
The cold man of science, who walks with his eyes
All alert through a garden of flowers, and strips
The lilies' gold tongues, and the roses' red lips,
With a ruthless dissection; since he, I suppose,
Has some purpose beyond the mere mischief he
does.
But the stupid and mischievous boy, that uproots

The exotics, and tramples the tender young shoots
For a boy's brutal pastime, and only because
He knows no distinction 'twixt heartsease and haws, —
One would wish, for the sake of each nursling so nipp'd,
To catch the young rascal and have him well whipp'd!

LORD ALFRED.

Some compatriot of mine, do I then understand,
With a cold Northern heart, and a rude English hand,
Has injured your Rosebud of France?

STRANGER.

Sir, I know
But little, or nothing. Yet some faces show
The last act of a tragedy in their regard:
Though the first scenes be wanting, it yet is not hard
To divine, more or less, what the plot may have been,
And what sort of actors have pass'd o'er the scene.
And whenever I gaze on the face of Lucile,
With its pensive and passionless languor, I feel
That some feeling hath burnt there . . . burnt out, and burnt up
Health and hope. So you feel when you gaze down the cup
Of extinguish'd volcanoes: you judge of the fire
Once there, by the ravage you see; — the desire,
By the apathy left in its wake, and that sense
Of a moral, immovable, mute impotence.

LORD ALFRED.

Humph! . . . I see you have finish'd, at last, your cigar:
Can I offer another?

STRANGER.

No, thank you We are
Not two miles from Serchon.

LORD ALFRED.

You know the road well?

STRANGER.

I have often been over it.

XXI.

Here a pause fell
On their converse. Still, musingly on, side by side
In the moonlight, the two men continued to ride
Down the dim mountain pathway. But each, for the rest
Of their journey, altho' they still rode on abreast,
Continued to follow in silence the train
Of the different feelings that haunted his brain;
And each, as though roused from a deep reverie,
Almost shouted, descending the mountain, to see
Burst at once on the moonlight the silvery Baths,
The long lime-tree alley, the dark gleaming paths,
With the lamps twinkling through them — the quaint wooden roofs —
The little white houses.
The clatter of hoofs,
And the music of wandering bands, up the walls
Of the steep hanging hill, at remote intervals
Reach'd them, cross'd by the sound of the clacking of whips,
And here and there, faintly, through serpentine slips
Of verdant rose-gardens, dew-shelter'd with screens
Of airy acacias and dark evergreens,
They could mark the white dresses, and catch the light songs,
Of the lovely Parisians that wander'd in throngs

Led by Laughter and Love through the cool even-
tide,
Down the dream-haunted valley, or up the hill-side.

XXII.

At length at the door of the inn l'HERISSON,
(Pray go there, if ever you go to Serchon!)
The two horsemen, well pleased to have reach'd it,
alighted
And exchanged their last greetings.
The Frenchman invited
Lord Alfred to dinner. Lord Alfred declined.
He had letters to write, and felt tired. So he dined
In his own rooms that night.
With an unquiet eye
He watch'd his companion depart; nor knew why,
Beyond all accountable reason or measure,
He felt in his breast such a sovran displeasure.
'The fellow 's good-looking,' he murmur'd at last,
'And yet not a coxcomb.' Some ghost of the past
Vex'd him still.
'If he love her,' he thought, 'let him
win her.'
Then he turn'd to the future — and order'd his
dinner.

XXIII.

O hour of all hours, the most bless'd upon earth,
Blessèd hour of our dinners!
The land of his birth
The face of his first love; the bills that he owes;
The twaddle of friends, and the venom of foes;
The sermon he heard when to church he last went;
The money he borrow'd, the money he spent; —
All of these things a man, I believe, may forget,
And not be the worse for forgetting; but yet
Never, never, oh never! earth's luckiest sinner
Hath unpunish'd forgotten the hour of his dinner!
Indigestion, that conscience of every bad stomach,

Shall relentlessly gnaw and pursue him with some ache
Or some pain; and trouble, remorseless, his best ease,
As the Furies once troubled the sleep of Orestes.

XXIV.

We may live without poetry, music, and art;
We may live without conscience, and live without heart;
We may live without friends; we may live without books;
But civilized man cannot live without cooks.
He may live without books,—what is knowledge but grieving?
He may live without hope,—what is hope but deceiving?
He may live without love,—what is passion but pining?
But where is the man that can live without dining?

XXV.

Lord Alfred found, waiting his coming, a note
From Lucile.
'Your last letter has reach'd me,' she wrote.
'This evening, alas! I must go to the ball,
'And shall not be at home till too late for your call,
'But to-morrow, at any rate, *sans faute*, at One
'You will find me at home, and will find me alone.
'Meanwhile, let me thank you sincerely, milord,
'For the honour with which you adhere to your word.
'Yes, I thank you, Lord Alfred! To-morrow, then.
'L.'

XXVI.

I find myself terribly puzzled to tell
The feelings with which Alfred Vargrave flung down

This note, as he pour'd out his wine. I must own
That I think he, himself, could have hardly explain'd
Those feelings exactly.
'Yes, yes,' as he drain'd
The glass down, he mutter'd, 'Jack 's right, after all:
'The coquette!'
'Does milord mean to go to the ball?'
Ask'd the waiter, who linger'd.
'Perhaps. I don't know.
'You may keep me a ticket, in case I should go.'

XXVII.

Oh, better, no doubt, is a dinner of herbs,
When season'd by love, which no rancour disturbs,
And sweeten'd by all that is sweetest in life,
Than turbot, bisque, ortalans, eaten in strife!
But if, out of humour, and hungry, alone
A man should sit down to a dinner, each one
Of the dishes of which the cook chooses to spoil
With a horrible mixture of garlic and oil,
The chances are ten against one, I must own,
He gets up as ill-temper'd as when he sat down.
And if any reader this fact to dispute is
Disposed, I say . . . '*Allium edat cicutis*
'*Nocentius!*'
Round the fruit and the wine
Undisturb'd the wasp settled. The evening was fine.
Lord Alfred his chair by the window had set,
And languidly lighted his small cigarette.
The window was open. The warm air without
Waved the flame of the candles. The moths were about.
In the gloom he sat gloomy.

XXVIII.

Gay sounds from below
Floated up like faint echoes of joys long ago,
And night deepen'd apace: through the dark avenues
The lamps twinkled bright; and by threes, and by twos,
The idlers of Serchon were strolling at will,
As Lord Alfred could see from the cool window sill,
Where his gaze, as he languidly turn'd it, fell o'er
His late travelling companion, now passing before
The inn, at the window of which he still sat,
In full toilette, — boots varnish'd, and snowy cravat,
Gayly smoothing and buttoning a yellow kid glove,
As he turn'd down the avenue.
Watching above,
From his window, the stranger, who stopp'd as he walk'd
To mix with those groups, and now nodded, now talk'd,
To the young Paris dandies, Lord Alfred discern'd,
By the way hats were lifted, and glances were turn'd,
That his unknown acquaintance, now bound for the ball,
Was a person of rank and of fashion; for all
Whom he bow'd to in passing, or stopp'd with and chatter'd,
Walk'd on with a look which implied . . . 'I feel flatter'd!'

XXIX.

His form was soon lost in the distance and gloom.

XXX.

Lord Alfred still sat by himself in his room.
He had finish'd, one after the other, a dozen

Or more cigarettes. He had thought of his cousin:
He had thought of Matilda, and thought of Lucile:
He had thought about many things: thought a great deal
Of himself: of his past life, his future, his present:
He had thought of the moon, neither full moon nor crescent:
Of the gay world, so sad! life, so sweet and so sour!
He had thought too, of glory, and fortune, and power:
Thought of love, and the country, and sympathy, and
A poet's asylum in some distant land:
Thought of man in the abstract, and woman, no doubt,
In particular; also he had thought much about
His digestion, his debts, and his dinner: and last,
He thought that the night would be stupidly pass'd
If he thought any more of such matters at all:
So he rose, and resolved to set out for the ball.

XXXI.

I believe, ere he finish'd his tardy toilette,
That Lord Alfred had spoil'd, and flung by in a pet,
Half-a-dozen white neckcloths, and look'd for the nonce
Twenty times in the glass, if he look'd in it once.
I believe that he split up, in drawing them on,
Three pair of pale lavender gloves, one by one.
And this is the reason, no doubt, that at last,
When he reach'd the Casino, although he walk'd fast,
He heard, as he hurriedly enter'd the door,
The church clock strike Twelve.

XXXII.

The last waltz was just o'er.

The chaperons and dancers were all in a flutter.
A crowd block'd the door: and a buzz and a
mutter
Went about in the room as a young man, whose
face
Lord Alfred had seen ere he enter'd that place,
But a few hours ago, through the perfumed and
warm
Flowery porch, with a lady that lean'd on his arm
Like a queen in a fable of old fairy days,
Left the ballroom.

XXXIII.

The hubbub of comment and praise
Reach'd Lord Alfred as just then he enter'd.
'*Ma foi!*'
Said a Frenchman beside him, . . . 'That lucky
Luvois
'Has obtained all the gifts of the gods . . . rank
and wealth,
'And good looks, and then such inexhaustible
health!
'He that hath shall have more; and this truth, I
surmise,
'Is the cause why, to-night, by the beautiful eyes
'Of *la charmante Lucile* more distinguish'd than
all,
'He so gayly goes off with the belle of the ball.'
'Is it true,' ask'd a lady aggressively fat,
Who, fierce as a female Leviathan, sat
By another that look'd like a needle, all steel
And tenuity — 'Luvois will marry Lucile?'
The needle seem'd jerk'd by a virulent twitch,
As tho' it were bent upon driving a stitch
Thro' somebody's character.
'Madam,' replied,
Interposing, a young man who sat by their side,
And was languidly fanning his face with his hat,
'I am ready to bet my new Tilbury that,

'If Luvois has proposed, the Countesse has refused.'
The fat and thin ladies were highly amused.
'Refused!... what! a young Duke, not thirty, my dear,
'With at least half a million (what is it?) a year!
'That may be,' said the third; 'yet I know some time since
'Castelmar was refused, though as rich and a Prince.
'But Luvois, who was never before in his life
'In love with a woman who was not a wife,
'Is now certainly serious.'

XXXIV.

The music once more Recommenced.

XXXV.

Said Lord Alfred, 'This ball is a bore!
And return'd to the inn, somewhat worse than before.

XXXVI.

There, whilst musing he lean'd the dark valley above,
Thro' the warm land were wand'ring the spirits of love.
A soft breeze in the white window drapery stirr'd;
In the blossom'd acacia the lone cricket chirr'd;
The scent of the roses fell faint o'er the night,
And the moon on the mountain was dreaming in light.
Repose, and yet rapture! that pensive wild nature
Impregnate with passion in each breathing feature!
Like a maiden withdrawn in her chamber, while yet
Her lip with her first lover's first kiss is wet,
In the bloom of its virginal blossom, who hears
Her full heart beat loud in her small rosy ears.

Through the exquisite silence of passionate trance,
Whilst, reveal'd in the light of youth's tender romance,
Life's first great discovery dreamily moves
Into sweet self-surprise — she is loved, and she loves!

XXXVII.

A stone's throw from thence, through the large lime-trees peep'd,
In a garden of roses, a white châlet, steep'd
In the moonbeams. The windows oped down to the lawn;
The casements were open; the curtains were drawn;
Lights stream'd from the inside; and with them the sound
Of music and song. In the garden, around
A table with fruits, wine, tea, ices, there set,
Half a dozen young men and young women were met.
Light, laughter, and voices, and music, all stream'd
Through the quiet-leaved limes. At the window there seem'd
For one moment the outline, familiar and fair,
Of a white dress, a white neck, and soft dusky hair,
Which Lord Alfred remember'd . . . a moment or so
It hover'd, then pass'd into shadow; and slow
The soft notes, from a tender piano upflung,
Floated forth, and a voice unforgotten thus sung: —

'Hear a song that was born in the land of my birth!
'The anchors are lifted, the fair ship is free,
And the shout of the mariners floats in its mirth
'Twixt the light in the sky and the light on the sea.

'And this ship is a world. She is freighted with souls,
'She is freighted with merchandise: proudly she sails
With the Labour that stores, and the Will that controls
'The gold in the ingots, the silk in the bales.

From the gardens of Pleasure, where reddens the rose,
'And the scent of the cedar is faint on the air,
'Past the harbours of Traffic sublimely she goes,
'Man's hopes o'er the world of the waters to bear!

'Where the cheer from the harbours of Traffic is heard,
'Where the gardens of Pleasure fade fast on the sight,
O'er the rose, o'er the cedar, there passes a bird;
''T is the Paradise Bird, never known to alight.

'And that bird, bright and bold as a Poet's desire,
'Roams her own native heavens, the realms of her birth.
'There she soars like a seraph, she shines like a fire,
'And her plumage hath never been sullied by earth.

And the mariners greet her; there 's song on each lip,
'For that bird of good omen, and joy in each eye.
'And the ship and the bird, and the bird and the ship,
'Together go forth over ocean and sky.

'Fast, fast fades the land! far the rose-gardens flee.

'And far fleet the harbours. In regions unknown
'The ship is alone on a desert of sea,
'And the bird in a desert of sky is alone.

'In those regions unknown, o'er that desert of air,
'Down that desert of waters — tremendous in wrath —
'The storm-wind Euroclydon leaps from his lair,
'And cleaves, through the waves of the ocean, his path.

'And the bird in the cloud, and the ship on the wave,
'Overtaken, are beaten about by wild gales;
'And the mariners all rush their cargo to save,
'Of the gold in the ingots, the silk in the bales.

'Lo! a wonder, which never before hath been heard,
'For it never before hath been given to sight;
'On the ship hath descended the Paradise Bird,
'The Paradise Bird, never know to alight!

'The bird which the mariner bless'd, when each lip
'Had a song for the omen that gladden'd each eye,
'The bright bird for shelter had flown to the ship
'From the wrath on the sea and the wrath in the sky.

'But the mariners heed not the bird any more.
'They are felling the masts — they are furling the sails;
'Some are working, some weeping, and some wrangling o'er
'Their gold in the ingots, their silk in the bales.

'Souls of men are on board; wealth of men in the hold:

'And the storm-wind Euroclydon sweeps to his prey;
'And who heeds the bird? "Save the silk and the gold!"
'And the bird from her shelter the gust sweeps away!

'Poor Paradise Bird! on her lone flight once more
'Back again in the wake of the wind she is driven —
'To be whelm'd in the storm, or above it to soar,
'And, if rescued from ocean, to vanish in heaven!

'And the ship rides the waters, and weathers the gales:
'From the haven she nears the rejoicing is heard.
'All hands are at work on the ingots, the bales,
'Save a child, sitting lonely, who misses — the Bird!'*

* The idea which is imperfectly embodied in this song was suggested to me by a friend, to whom I am indebted for so much throughout this poem, that I gladly avail myself of this passing opportunity, in acknowledging the fact, to record my grateful sense of it. I name him not. When he reads these words his heart will comprehend what is in mine while I write them.

CANTO III.

I.

RISE, O Muse, in the wrath of thy rapture divine,
And sweep with a finger of awe every line,
Till it tremble and burn, as thine own glances burn
Through the vision thou kindlest! wherein I discern
All the unconscious cruelty hid in the heart
Of mankind; all the limitless grief we impart,
Unawares, to each other; the limitless wrong
We inflict without heed, as we hurry along
In this boisterous pastime of life. So we toy
With the infinite! so, in our sport we destroy
What we made not, and cannot remake thro' the whole
Of existence, those feelings which are, in the soul,
Future heavens or hells! so we recklessly scorn,
In each other, Life's solemn significance! Worn
In a too careless breast, lo! the flower, left to bloom
Round the desolate moral inscribed on a tomb—
'Youth, Hope, Beauty, Innocence, Tenderness, Trust,'
(So it runs,) 'this was Woman. Behold, it is dust!
This was Woman: it lived and it breath'd: and it said
"*I love, and love dies not.*"' Behold, it is dead.
'This was woman: our hearts at her feet we laid down;
'It is dust: and we trample it under our own.'
Are we doom'd then, O sister, O brother, to war

On each other forever? half-lives as we are!
Still impell'd to unite, still from union self-thrust,
Like those poor wounded worms we see writhe in the dust,
Blindly groping about, with the instinct of pain,
For each other, their maim'd life to mingle again.
We, that need help and healing, O sister, O brother,
Are we cannibals still of the hearts of each other?
In despite of its much-boasted science and art,
Is this civilized world still a savage at heart?
Mourn, O Muse, — not indeed for the wrongs Life hath felt —
These have mourners enough in the world; mourn, and melt
Into tears else unshed, for the wrongs Life hath wrought,
By the transient desire and the trivial thought;
For the man (be he lover or loved) that doth jest
With the passionate earnest of love in the breast
Of a woman; for the woman (or maiden, or wife)
That doth sport with the passionate earnest of life
In the heart of a man. Mourn, O Muse, for the soul,
When her truest seem truthless, her fairest so foul!
I have seen falsehood veil'd by the virginal cheek
Of a child; I have seen the immaculate, meek
Desdemona false; Imogen wanton; have seen
Juliet faithless; and she, the chaste Ithacan Queen,
Choose a swine from her suitors, and from his embrace
Rise to write to her lord that she pined for his face
In a tender Ovidian strain! I have seen
The young bride shrewdly eying the cypress between
Her first year's orange-blossoms, and blush not to crave

From the couch of a bridegroom the price of his grave!
Blush, O Muse, blush and burn! I have seen, I have seen,
At the feet of a wanton with false-modest mien,
The giants of Genius and Power enchain'd,
While paler and paler their foreheads have waned.

Yes! this life is the war of the False and the True.
Yet this life is a truth; though so complex to view
That its latent veracity few of us find!
But alas! for that man who, in judging mankind
From a false point of view, should disloyally deal
With the truth the world keeps, though the world may conceal.
Ay, the world but a frivolous phantasm seems,
And mankind in the mass but as motes in sunbeams;
But when Fate, from the midst of this frivolous nature,
Selects for her purpose some frail human creature,
And the Angel of Sorrow, outstretching a wan
Forefinger to mark him, strikes down from the man
The false life that hid him, the man's self appears
A solemn reality: Him the dread spheres
Of heaven and hell with their forces dispute,
And dare *we* be indifferent? Hence, and be mute,
Light scoffer, vain trifler! Through all thou discernest
A Greater than thou is at work, and in earnest;
And he who dares trifle with man, trifles too
With man's awful Maker.
There 's terror that 's true
In that tale of a youth who, one night at a revel,
Amidst music and mirth lured and wiled by some devil,

Follow'd ever one mask through the mad masquerade,
Till, pursued to some chamber deserted ('t is said),
He unmask'd with a kiss, the strange lady, and stood
Face to face with a Thing not of flesh nor of blood.
In this Masque of the Passions call'd life there 's no human
Emotion, though mask'd, or in man or in woman,
But, when faced and unmask'd, it will leave us at last
Struck by some supernatural aspect aghast.
For Truth is appalling and eltrich, as seen
By this world's artificial lamplights, and we screen
From our sight the strange vision that troubles our life.
Alas! why is Genius forever at strife
With the world, which, despite the world's self, it ennobles?
Why is it that Genius perplexes and troubles
And offends the effete life it comes to renew?
'T is the terror of Truth! 't is that Genius is true!

II.

Lucile de Nevers (if her riddle I read)
Was a woman of genius: not genius, indeed,
In the abstract, nor yet in the abstract mere woman:
But THE WOMAN OF GENIUS, essentially human,
Yet forever at war with her own human nature;
The genius, now fused in the woman, gave stature
And strength to her sex; now the woman, at war
With the genius, impeded its flight to the star.
As it is with all genius, the essence and soul
Of her nature was truth. When she sought to control,
Or to stifle, or palter in aught with that truth,
T was when life seem'd to grant it no issues.
Her youth

One occasion had known, when, if fused in an other,
That tumult of soul, which she now sought to smother,
Finding scope within man's larger life, and controll'd
By man's clearer judgment, perchance might have roll'd
Into channels enriching the troubled existence
Which it now only vex'd with an inward resistance.
But that chance fell too soon, when the crude sense of power
Which had been to her nature so fatal a dower,
Was too fierce and unfashion'd to fuse itself yet
In the life of another, and served but to fret
And to startle the man it yet haunted and thrall'd;
And that moment, once lost, had been never recall'd.
But it left her heart sore: and to shelter her heart
From approach, she then sought, in that delicate art
Of concealment, those thousand adroit strategies
Of feminine wit, which repel while they please,
A weapon, at once, and a shield, to conceal
And defend all that women can earnestly feel.
Thus, striving her instincts to hide and repress,
She felt frighten'd at times by her very success;
She pined for the hill-tops, the clouds, and the stars:
Golden wires may annoy us as much as steel bars
If they keep us behind prison-windows: impassion'd
Her heart rose and burst the light cage she had fashion'd
Out of glittering trifles around it, unfurl'd
Wings of desolate flight, and soar'd up from the world.
In this dual identity possibly lay

The secret and charm of her singular sway
Over men of the world. 'T was the genius, all warm
With the woman, that gave to the woman a charm
Indescribably strange; there appear'd in her life
A puzzle, a mystery — something at strife
With such men, which yet thrall'd and enchain'd them in part,
And, perplexing the fancy, still haunted the heart.
That intensity, earnestness, depth, or veracity,
Which starward impell'd her with such pertinacity
As turns to the loadstar the needle, reflected
Itself upon others: she therefore affected,
Unconsciously, those amongst whom she was thrown,
As the magnet the metal it neighbours.
Unknown
To herself, all her instincts, without hesitation,
Embraced the idea of self-immolation.
Unlike man's stern intellect, which, while it stands
Aloof from the minds that it sways and commands
By a power wrench'd from labour, sublimely compels
All around and beneath the high sphere where it dwells
To its fix'd and imperial purpose; in her
The soft spirit of woman that seeks to confer
Its sweet self on the loved, had her life but been blended
With some man's whose heart had her own comprehended,
All its wealth at his feet would have lavishly thrown.
For him she had then been ambitious alone;
For him had aspired; in him had transfused
All the gladness and grace of her nature; and used
For him only the spells of its delicate power:
Like the ministering fairy that brings from her bower

To some mage all the treasures, whose use the fond elf
More enrich'd by her love, disregards for herself.
But standing apart, as she ever had done,
And her genius, which needed a vent, finding none
In the broad fields of action thrown wide to man's power,
She unconsciously made it her bulwark and tower,
And built in it her refuge, whence lightly she hurl'd
Her contempt at the fashions and forms of the world.

And, indeed, her chief fault was this unconscious scorn
Of the world, to whose usages woman is born.
Not the WORLD, where that word implies all human nature,
The Creator's great gift to the needs of the creature:
That large heart, with its sorrow to solace, its care
To assuage, and its grand aspirations to share:
But the world, with encroachments that chafe and perplex,
With its men against man, and its sex against sex.
'*Ah, what will the world say?*' with her was a query
Never utter'd, or utter'd alone with a dreary
Rejection in thought of the answer before
It was heard: hence the thing which she sought to ignore
And escape from in thought, she encounter'd in act
By the blindness with which she opposed it.
In fact,
Had Lucile found in life that communion which links
All that woman but dreams, feels, conceives of, and thinks,

With what man acts and is,—concentrating the strength
Of her genius within her affections, at length
Finding woman's full use through man's life, by man's skill
Readapted to forms fix'd for life, the strong will
And high heart which the world's creeds now recklessly braved,
From the world's crimes the man of the world would have saved;
Reconciled, as it were, the divine with the human,
And, exalting the man, have completed the woman.

But the permanent cause why she now miss'd and fail'd
That firm hold upon life she so keenly assail'd,
Was, in all those diurnal occasions that place
The world and the woman opposed face to face,
Where the woman must yield, she, refusing to stir,
Offended the world, which in turn wounded her.

For the world is a nettle; disturb it, it stings:
Grasp it firmly, it stings not. On one of two things,
If you would not be stung, it behoves you to settle:
Avoid it, or crush it. She crush'd not the nettle;
For she could not; nor would she avoid it: she tried
With the weak hand of woman to thrust it aside,
And it stung her. A woman is too slight a thing
To trample the world without feeling its sting.

III.

One lodges but simply at Serchon; yet, thanks
To the season that changes forever the banks
Of the blossoming mountains, and shifts the light cloud
O'er the valley, and hushes or rouses the loud

Wind that wails in the pines, or creeps murmuring down
The dark evergreen slopes to the slumbering town,
And the torrent that falls, faintly heard from afar,
And the bluebells that purple the dapple-gray scaur,
One sees with each month of the many-faced year
A thousand sweet changes of beauty appear.
The châlet where dwelt the Comtesse de Nevers
Rested half up the base of a mountain of firs,
In a garden of roses, reveal'd to the road,
Yet withdrawn from its noise: 't was a peaceful abode.
And the walls, and the roofs, with their gables like hoods
Which the monks wear, were built of sweet resinous woods.
The sunlight of noon, as Lord Alfred ascended
The steep garden paths, every odour had blended
Of the ardent carnations, and faint heliotropes,
With the balms floated down from the dark wooded slopes:
A light breeze at the windows was playing about,
And the white curtains floated, now in, and now out.
The house was all hush'd when he rang at the door,
Which was open'd to him in a moment or more
By an old nodding negress, whose sable head shined
In the sun like a cocoa-nut polish'd in Ind,
'Neath the snowy *foularde* which about it was wound.

IV.

Lord Alfred sprang forward at once, with a bound.
He remember'd the nurse of Lucile. The old dame,
Whose teeth and whose eyes used to beam when he came,

With a boy's eager step, in the blithe days of yore,
To pass, unannounced, her young mistress's door.
The old woman had fondled Lucile on her knee
When she left, as an infant, far over the sea,
In India, the tomb of a mother, unknown,
To pine, a pale flowret, in great Paris town.
She had sooth'd the child's sobs on her breast when she read
The letter that told her her father was dead.
An astute, shrewd adventurer, who, like Ulysses,
Had studied men, cities, laws, the abysses
Of statecraft, with varying fortunes, was he.
He had wander'd the world through, by land and by sea,
And knew it in most of its phases. Strong will,
Subtle tact, and soft manners, had given him skill
To conciliate Fortune, and courage to brave
Her displeasure. Thrice shipwreck'd, and cast by the wave
On his own quick resources, they rarely had fail'd
His command: often baffled, he ever prevail'd,
In his combat with fate: to-day flatter'd and fed
By monarchs, to-morrow in search of mere bread.
The offspring of times trouble-haunted, he came
Of a family ruin'd, yet noble in name.
He lost sight of his fortune, at twenty, in France;
And, half statesman, half soldier, and wholly Free-lance,
Had wander'd, in search of it, over the world,
Into India.
But scarce had the nomad unfurl'd
His wandering tent at Mysore, in the smile
Of a Rajah (whose court he controll'd for a while,
And whose council he prompted and govern'd by stealth);
Scarce, indeed, had he wedded an Indian of wealth,
Who died giving birth to this daughter, before
He was borne to the tomb of his wife at Mysore.
His fortune, which went to his orphan, perchance

Had secured her a home with his sister in France,
A lone woman, the last of the race left. Lucile
Neither felt, nor affected, the wish to conceal
The half-Eastern blood, which appear'd to bequeath
(Reveal'd now and then, though but rarely, beneath
That outward repose that conceal'd it in her)
A something half wild to her strange character.
The old nurse with the orphan, awhile broken-hearted,
At the door of a convent in Paris had parted.
But later, once more, with her mistress she tarried,
When the girl, by that grim maiden aunt, had been married
To a dreary old Count, who had sullenly died,
With no claim on her tears — she had wept as a bride.
In those days the old negress, now shaking her head
So vaguely, had laugh'd with '*le petit Alfred*,'
Now she seem'd to remember him not. With a sigh
Thought Lord Alfred, 'So changed in a few years am I?'
Then he pass'd on. 'Your mistress expects me.' The crone
Oped the drawing-room door, and there left him alone.

V.

O'er the soft atmosphere of this temple of grace
Rested silence and perfume. No sound reach'd the place.
In the white curtains waver'd the delicate shade
Of the heaving acacias, through which the breeze play'd.
O'er the smooth wooden floor, polish'd dark as a glass,
Fragrant white Indian matting allow'd you to pass.

In light olive baskets, by window and door,
Some hung from the ceiling, some crowding the floor,
Rich wild flowers, pluck'd by Lucile from the hill,
Seem'd the room with their passionate presence to fill:
Blue aconite, hid in white roses, reposed;
The deep belladonna its vermeil disclosed;
And the frail saponaire, and the tender blue-bell,
And the purple valerian, — each child of the fell
And the solitude flourish'd, fed fair from the source
Of waters the huntsman scarce heeds in his course,
Where the chamois and izard, with delicate hoof,
Pause or flit through the pinnacled silence aloof.

VI.

This white, little, fragrant apartment, 't is true,
Seem'd unconsciously fashion'd for some rendezvous;
But you felt, by the sense of its beauty reposed,
'T was the shrine of a life chaste and calm. Half unclosed
In the light slept the flowers: all was pure and at rest;
All peaceful; all modest; all seem'd self-possess'd,
And aware of the silence. No vestige nor trace
Of a young woman's coquetry troubled the place;
Not a scarf, not a shawl: on the mantel-piece merely
A nosegay of flowers, all wither'd, or nearly,
And a little white glove, that was torn at the wrist.
Impell'd by an impulse, too strong to resist,
Lord Alfred caught up, with a feverish grasp,
The torn glove, and flung it aside with a gasp;
It seem'd like the thrill of a final farewell.
He took up the nosegay, without bloom or smell,
And inaudibly, bitterly, mutter'd, or sigh'd
Some rebuke to the flowers ere he laid it aside.
Had Lucile by design left the dead flowers there?

The torn glove? I know nothing. I cannot declare.

VII.

He turn'd to the window. A cloud pass'd the sun.
The breeze lifted itself up the leaves, one by one.
Just then Lucile enter'd the room, undiscern'd
By Lord Alfred, whose face to the window was turn'd,
In a strange reverie.
The time was, when Lucile,
In beholding that man, could not help but reveal
The rapture, the fear, which wrench'd out every nerve
In the heart of the girl from the woman's reserve.
And now — she gazed at him, calm, smiling, — perchance
Indifferent.

VIII.

Indifferently turning his glance,
Alfred Vargrave encounter'd that gaze unaware.
O'er a boddice snow-white stream'd her soft, dusky hair;
A rose-bud half-blown in her hand; in her eyes
A half pensive smile.
A sharp cry of surprise
Escap'd from his lips: then, embarrass'd and vex'd,
He saluted the Countess; and sought, much perplex'd,
For some trivial remark — the conventional phrases —
Irreproachable manners, appropriate praises.
But, in spite of himself, some unknown agitation,
An invincible trouble, a strange palpitation,
Confused his ingenious and frivolous wit;
Overtook, and entangled, and paralyzed it.
That wit so complacent and docile, that ever
Lightly came at the call of the lightest endeavour,

Ready coin'd, and availably current as gold,
Which, secure of its value, so fluently roll'd
In free circulation from hand on to hand
For the usage of all, at a moment's command;
For once it rebell'd, it was mute and unstirr'd,
And he look'd at Lucile without speaking a word.

IX.

Perhaps what so troubled him was, that the face
On whose features he gazed had no more than a trace
Of the face his remembrance had imaged for years.
Yes! the face he remember'd was faded with tears:
Grief had famish'd the figure, and dimm'd the dark eyes,
And starved the pale lips, too acquainted with sighs.
And that tender, and gracious, and fond *coquetterie*
Of a woman who knows her least ribbon to be
Something dear to the lips that so warmly caress
Every sacred detail of her exquisite dress,
In the careless toilette of Lucile, — then too sad
To care aught to her changeable beauty to add, —
Lord Alfred had never admired before!
Alas! poor Lucile, in those weak days of yore,
Had neglected herself, never heeding, nor thinking
(While the blossom and bloom of her beauty were shrinking)
That sorrow can beautify only the heart —
Not the face — of a woman; and can but impart
Its endearment to one that hath suffer'd. In truth
Grief hath beauty for grief; but gay youth loves gay youth.

X.

The woman that now met, unshrinking, his gaze,
Seem'd to bask in the silent but sumptuous blaze
Of that soft second summer, more ripe than the first,

Which returns when the bud to the blossom hath burst
In despite of the stormiest April. Lucile
Had acquired that matchless unconscious appeal
To the homage which none but a churl would withhold —
That caressing and exquisite grace — never bold,
Ever present — which just a few women possess.
From a healthful repose, undisturb'd by the stress
Of unquiet emotions, her soft cheek had drawn
A freshness as pure as the twilight of dawn.
Her figure, though slight, had revived everywhere
The luxurious proportions of youth; and her hair —
Once shorn as an offering to passionate love —
Now floated or rested redundant above
Her airy pure forehead and throat; gather'd loose
Under which, by one violet knot, the profuse
Milk-white folds of a cool, modest garment reposed,
Rippled faint by the breast they half hid, half disclosed.
And her simple attire thus in all things reveal'd
The fine art which so artfully all things conceal'd.

XI.

Lord Alfred, who never conceiv'd that Lucile
Could have look'd so enchanting, felt tempted to kneel
At her feet, and her pardon with passion implore;
But the calm smile that met him sufficed to restore
The pride and the bitterness needed to meet
The occasion with dignity due and discreet.

XII.

'Madam,' — thus he began with a voice reassur'd —
'You see that your latest command has secur'd
'My immediate obedience — presuming I may
'Consider my freedom restor'd from this day' —

I had thought,' said Lucile, with a smile gay yet sad.

'That your freedom from me not a fetter has had.
'Indeed! . . . in my chains have you rested till now?
'I had not so flatter'd myself, I avow!'

'For Heaven's sake, Madam,' Lord Alfred replied,
'Do not jest! has this moment no sadness?' he sigh'd.

''T is an ancient tradition,' she answer'd, 'a tale
'Often told — a position too sure to prevail
'In the end of all legends of love. If we wrote,
'When we first love, foreseeing that hour yet remote
'Wherein of necessity each would recall
'From the other the poor foolish records of all
'Those emotions, whose pain, when recorded, seem'd bliss,
'Should we write as we wrote? But one thinks not of this!
'At twenty (who does not at twenty?) we write
'Believing eternal the frail vows we plight;
'And we smile with a confident pity, above
'The vulgar results of all poor human love:
'For we deem, with that vanity common to youth,
'Because what we feel in our bosoms, in truth,
'Is novel to us — that 't is novel to earth,
'And will prove the exception in durance and worth,
'To the great law to which all on earth must incline.
'The error was noble, the vanity fine!
'Shall we blame it because we survive it? ah, no;
'T was the youth of our youth, my lord, is it not so?'

XIII.

She look'd at Lord Alfred. No word he replied;
He was startled, and felt stunn'd, scared, stupefied.

This cold, keen philosophy, trenchant as steel,
On the lips of a woman so young as Lucile,
Appall'd him. He seem'd to remember her yet
A child — the weak sport of each moment's regret,
Blindly yielding herself to the errors of life,
The deceptions of youth, and borne down by the strife
And the tumult of passion; the tremulous toy
Of each transient emotion of grief or of joy.
But to watch her pronounce the death-warrant of all
The illusions of life — lift, unflinching, the pall
From the bier of the dead Past — that woman so fair,
And so young, yet her own self-survivor; who there
Traced her life's epitaph with a finger so cold!
'T was a picture that touch'd him with pain to behold.
He himself knew — none better — the things to be said
Upon subjects like this. Yet he bow'd down his head:
He had not the courage, he dared not decide
To aid that frail hand to the heart's suicide.

XIV.

As thus, with a trouble he could not command,
He paused, crumpling the letters he held in his hand,
'You know me enough,' she continued, 'or what
I would say is, you yet recollect (do you not,
Lord Alfred?) enough of my nature, to know
'That these pledges of what was perhaps long ago
'A foolish affection, I do not recall
'From those motives of prudence which actuate all
'Or most women, when their love ceases. Indeed,
'If you have such a doubt, to dispel it I need
'But remind you that ten years these letters have rested

'Unreclaim'd in your hands, nor should I have
suggested
'Their return, if I had not, from all that I hear,
'Fear'd those letters might now (might they not?)
interfere
'With the peace of another.'

XV.

Lord Alfred looked up,
(His gaze had been fix'd on a blue Sèvres cup
With a look of profound connoisseurship — a smile
Of singular interest and care, all this while)
He look'd up, and look'd long in the face of Lucile,
To mark if that face by a sign would reveal
At the thought of Miss Darcy the least jealous pain.
He look'd keenly and long, yet he look'd there in
vain.
The face was calm, cheerful, reserv'd, and precise;
'Is this woman,' he thought, 'changed to diamond
or ice?'
'You are generous, Madam,' he murmur'd at last,
And into his voice a light irony pass'd,
'If these be indeed the sole motives you feel.'

'What others but these could I have?' said Lucile

'I might,' answer'd Alfred, 'presume, if I *did*
'Wish to call into question (which Heaven forbid!)
'The generous feelings that find me — believe —
'Most grateful — these letters you wish'd to receive
'From personal motives — '
She laugh'd at the word.
'Were it not somewhat late to have these? O my
lord,
'Had I waited, indeed, for . . . (what is it you
say?)
'Such "personal motives" (your words) till to-day,
'Would you not, of a truth, have experienced *one*
touch

'Of dreadful remorse?'

'You embarrass me much,'
Replied Alfred. He spoke with assurance, for here
He recover'd his ground, and had nothing to fear.
He had look'd for reproaches, and fully arranged
His forces. But straightway the enemy changed
The position.

XVI.

'Come!' gayly she here interposed,
With a smile whose divinely deep sweetness disclosed
Some depth in her nature he never had known,
While she tenderly laid her light hand on his own,
'Do not think I abuse the occasion. We gain
'Justice, judgment, with years, or else years are in vain.
'From me not a single reproach can you hear.
'I have sinn'd to myself — to the world — nay, I fear
'To you chiefly. The woman who loves should, indeed,
'Be the guide of the man that she loves. She should heed
'Not her selfish and often mistaken desires,
'But his interest whose fate her own interest inspires;
'And, rather than seek to allure, for her sake,
'His life down the turbulent, fanciful wake
'Of impossible destinies, use all her art
'That his place in the world find its place in her heart.
'I, alas! — I perceived not this truth till too late;
'I tormented your youth, I have darkened your fate.
'Forgive me the ill I have done for the sake
'Of its long expiation!'

XVII.

Lord Alfred, awake,
Seem'd to wander from dream on to dream. In that seat
Where he sat as a criminal, ready to meet
His accuser, he found himself turn'd by some change,
As surprising and all unexpected as strange,
To the judge from whose mercy indulgence was sought.
All the world's foolish pride in that moment was naught;
He felt all his plausible theories posed;
And, thrill'd by the beauty of nature disclosed
In the pathos of all he had witness'd, his head
And his knee he bow'd humbly, and faltering said,
'Ah, Madam! I feel that I never till now
'Comprehended you — never! I blush to avow
'That I have not deserved you.'

XVIII.

'No, no!' answer'd she;
'When you knew me, I was not what now I may be.
'Could the past be transferr'd, were I now to receive
'The love of a man whom the world loves, believe'—

[Thought Alfred,—'O hypocrite! loved and adored
By a duke, a grand seigneur, the fashion's gay lord!')

'Believe,' she resumed, 'if I had to dispose
'Of his life in the world where his fame should repose,
'I think I should know how to help his career,
'And to add to its happiness — not, as I fear
'I once sought, to destroy it.'

'Is this an advance?'
Thought Lord Alfred, and raised with a passionate glance
The hand of Lucile to his lips.
'T was a hand
White, delicate, dimpled, warm, languid, and bland.
The hand of a woman is often, in youth,
Somewhat rough, somewhat red, somewhat graceless in truth;
Does its beauty refine, as its pulses grow calm,
Or as Sorrow has cross'd the life-line in the palm?

XIX.

The more that he look'd, that he listen'd, the more
He discover'd perfections unnoticed before.
Whatever of strangeness, and wildness, and pride
She retained in her character, now undescried
In the depths of her being, naught outward betray'd;
Not a look that she look'd, not a word that she said.
Less salient than once, less poetic perchance,
This woman who thus had survived the romance
That had made him its hero, and breathed him its sighs,
Seem'd more charming a thousand times o'er to his eyes.
Alfred Vargrave forgot, ere an hour was thus gone,
All the years which between their existence had flown.
Nay, the whole of his life was forgotten. He seem'd
With some woman unknown till that hour; he half deem'd
That they met in that hour for the first time; and thought
That love at first sight from such eyes might be caught.

XX.

Together they talk'd of the years since when last

They parted, contrasting the present, the past.
Yet no memory marr'd their light converse. Lucile
Question'd much, with the interest a sister might feel,
Of Lord Alfred's new life, — of Miss Darcy — her face,
Her temper, accomplishments — pausing to trace
The advantage derived from a hymen so fit.
Of herself, she recounted with humour and wit
Her journeys, her daily employments, the lands
She had seen, and the books she had read, and the hands
She had shaken.
In all that she said there appear'd
An amiable irony. Laughing, she rear'd
The temple of reason, with ever a touch
Of light scorn at her work, reveal'd only so much
As there gleams, in the thyrsus that Bacchanals bear,
Thro' the blooms of a garland the point of a spear.
But above, and beneath, and beyond all of this,
To that soul, whose experience had paralyzed bliss,
A benignant indulgence, to all things resign'd,
A justice, a sweetness, a meekness of mind,
Gave a luminous beauty, as tender and faint
And serene as the halo encircling a saint.

XXI.

Unobserved by Lord Alfred the time fleeted by.
To each novel sensation spontaneously
He abandon'd himself with that ardor so strange
Which belongs to a mind grown accustom'd to change.
He sought, with well-practised and delicate art,
To surprise from Lucile the true state of her heart,
But his efforts were vain, and the woman, as ever,
More adroit than the man, baffled every endeavour.
When he deem'd he had touch'd on some chord in her being,

At the touch, it dissolved, and was gone. Ever fleeing
As ever he near it advanced, when he thought
To have seized, and proceeded to analyze aught
Of the moral existence, the absolute soul,
Light as vapour the phantom escaped his control.

XXII.

From the hall, on a sudden, a sharp ring was heard.
In the passage without a quick footstep there stirr'd.
At the door knock'd the negress, and thrust in her head,
'The Duke de Luvois had just enter'd,' she said,
'And insisted'—
'The Duke!' cried Lucile (as she spoke
The Duke's footsteps approaching a light echo woke).
'Say I do not receive till the evening. Explain,'
As she glanced at Lord Alfred, she added again,
'I have business of private importance.'
There came
O'er Lord Alfred at once, at the sound of that name,
An invincible sense of vexation. He turn'd
To Lucile, and he fancied he faintly discern'd
On her face an indefinite look of confusion.
On his mind instantaneously flash'd the conclusion
That his presence had caused it.
He said, with a sneer
Which he could not repress, 'Let not *me* interfere
'With the claims on your time, lady! when you are free
'From more pleasant engagements, allow me to see
'And to wait on you later.'
The words were not said
Ere he wish'd to recall them. He bitterly read
The mistake he had made in Lucile's flashing eye.
Inclining her head, as in haughty reply,

More reproachful perchance than all utter'd rebuke,
She said merely, resuming her seat, 'Tell the Duke
'He may enter.'
And vex'd with his own words and hers,
Alfred Vargrave bow'd low to Lucile de Nevers,
Pass'd the casement and enter'd the garden. Before
His shadow was fled the Duke stood at the door.

XXIII.

When left to his thoughts in the garden alone,
Alfred Vargrave stood, strange to himself. With dull tone
Of importance, thro' cities of rose and carnation,
Went the bee on his business from station to station.
The minute mirth of summer was shrill all around;
Its incessant small voices like stings seem'd to sound
On his sore angry sense. He stood grieving the hot
Solid sun with his shadow, nor stirr'd from the spot.
The last look of Lucile still bewilder'd, perplex'd,
And reproach'd him. The Duke's visit goaded and vex'd
And disturb'd him. At length, he resolved to remain
In the garden, and call on the Countess again
As soon as the Duke went. In short, he would stay,
Were it only to know when the Duke went away.
But just as he form'd this resolve, he perceived
Approaching towards him, between the thick-leaved
And luxuriant laurels, Lucile and the Duke.
Thus surprised, his first thought was to seek for some nook
Whence he might, unobserved, from the garden retreat.
They had not yet seen him. The sound of their feet
And their voices had warn'd him in time. They were walking

Towards him. The Duke (a true Frenchman) was talking
With the action of Talma. He saw at a glance
That they barr'd the sole path to the gateway. No chance
Of escape save in instant concealment! Deep-dipp'd
In thick foliage, an arbour stood near. In he slipp'd,
Saved from sight, as in front of that ambush they pass'd,
Still conversing. Beneath a laburnum at last
They paused, and sat down on a bench in the shade,
So close that he could not but hear what they said.

XXIV.

The Countess.

Comment, Monsieur le Duc?

The Duke.

Ah, forgive! . . . I desired
So deeply to see you to-day. You retired
So early last night from the ball . . . this whole week
I have seen you pale, silent, preoccupied . . . speak,
Speak, Lucile, and forgive me! . . . I know that I am
A rash fool — but I love you! I love you, Madame,
More than language can say! Do not deem, O Lucile,
That the love I no longer have strength to conceal
Is a passing caprice! It is strange to my nature,
It has made me, unknown to myself, a new creature.
It is not the Duke de Luvois that here kneels
To the Countess Lucile. 'T is a soul that appeals
To a soul, 't is a heart that cries out for a heart,

'T is the man you yourself have created in part,
That implores you to sanction and save the new life
Which he lays at your feet with this prayer — Be
my wife;
Stoop, and raise me!

Lord Alfred could scarcely restrain
The sudden, acute pang of anger and pain
With which he had heard this. As tho' to some
wind
The leaves of the hush'd, windless laurels behind
The Duke and the Countess were suddenly stirr'd.
The sound half betray'd him. They started. He
heard
The low voice of Lucile; but so faint was its tone
That her answer escaped him.
The Duke hurried on,
As though in remonstrance with what had been
spoken.
'Nay, I know it, Lucile! but your heart was not
broken
'By the trial in which all its fibres were proved.
'Love, perchance, you mistrust, yet you need to be
loved.
'You mistake your own feelings. I fear you mis-
take
'What so ill I interpret, those feelings which make
'Words like these vague and feeble. Whatever
your heart
'May have suffer'd of yore, this can only impart
'A pity profound to the love which I feel.
'Hush! hush! I know all. Tell me nothing, Lu-
cile.'

You know all, Duke?' she said; 'well then, know
that, in truth,
'I have learn'd from the rude lesson taught to my
youth
'From my own heart to shelter my life; to mistrust

'The heart of another. We are what we must,
'And not what we would be. I know that one hour
'Forestalls not another. The will and the power
'Are diverse.'
'O, madam!' he answer'd, 'you fence
'With a feeling you know to be true and intense.
''T is not *my* life, Lucile, that I plead for alone:
'If your nature I know, 't is no less for your own.
'That nature will prey on itself; it was made
'To influence others. Consider,' he said,
'You have genius, ambition — what scope for them here?
'Gifts less noble to *me* give command of that sphere
'In which genius is power. Such gifts you despise?
'But you do not disdain what such gifts realize!
'I offer you, Lady, a name not unknown —
'A fortune which worthless, without you, is grown —
'All my life at your feet I lay down — at your feet
'A heart which for you, and you only, can beat.'

THE COUNTESS.

That heart, Duke, that life — I respect both. The name
And position you offer, and all that you claim
In behalf of their nobler employment, I feel
To deserve what, in turn, I now ask you —

THE DUKE.

Lucile!

THE COUNTESS.

I ask you to leave me —

THE DUKE.

You do not reject?

THE COUNTESS.

I ask you to leave me the time to reflect.

THE DUKE.

You ask me?—

THE COUNTESS.

—The time to reflect.

THE DUKE.

Say—One word!
May I hope?

What the Countess replied was not heard
By Lord Alfred; for just then she rose, and moved on.
The Duke bow'd his lips o'er her hand, and was gone.

XXV.

Not a sound save the birds in the bushes. And when
Alfred Vargrave reel'd forth to the sunlight again,
He just saw the white robe of the Countess recede
As she enter'd the house.
Scarcely conscious indeed
Of his steps, he too follow'd, and enter'd.

XXVI.

He enter'd
Unnoticed; Lucile never stirr'd: so concentred
And wholly absorbed in her thoughts she appear'd.
Her back to the window was turn'd. As he near'd
The sofa, her face from the glass was reflected.
Her dark eyes were fixed on the ground. Pale, dejected,
And lost in profound meditation she seem'd.
Softly, silently, over her droop'd shoulders stream'd
The afternoon sunlight. The cry of alarm
And surprise which escaped her, as now on her arm
Alfred Vargrave let fall a hand icily cold
And clammy as death, all too cruelly told
How far he had been from her thoughts

XXVII.

All his cheek
Was disturb'd with the effort it cost him to speak.
'It was not my fault. I have heard all,' he said.
'Now the letters — and farewell, Lucile! When
you wed
'May' —
The sentence broke short, like a weapon
that snaps
When the weight of a man is upon it.
'Perhaps,'
Said Lucile (her sole answer reveal'd in the flush
Of quick colour which up to her brows seem'd to
rush
In reply to those few broken words), 'this farewell
'Is our last, Alfred Vargrave, in life. Who can
tell?
'Let us part without bitterness. Here are your
letters.
'Be assured I retain you no more in my fetters!'—
She laugh'd, as she said this, a little sad laugh.
And stretch'd out her hand with the letters. And
half
Wroth to feel his wrath rise, and unable to trust
His own powers of restraint, in his bosom he
thrust
The packet she gave, with a short angry sigh,
Bow'd his head, and departed without a reply.

XXVIII.

And Lucile was alone. And the men of the world
Were gone back to the world. And the world's
self was furl'd
Far away from the heart of the woman. Her hand
Droop'd, and from it, unloosed from their frail
silken band,
Fell those early love-letters, strewn, scatter'd, and
shed

At her feet — life's lost blossoms! Dejected, her head
On her bosom was bow'd. Her gaze vaguely stray'd o'er
Those strewn records of passionate moments no more.
From each page to her sight leapt some word that belied
The composure with which she that day had denied
Every claim on her heart to those poor perish'd years.
They avenged themselves now, and she burst into tears.

CANTO IV.

I.

LETTER FROM COUSIN JOHN TO COUSIN ALFRED.

'Bigorre, Thursday.

'TIME up, you rascal! Come back, or be hang'd.
'Matilda grows peevish. Her mother harangued
'For a whole hour this morning about you. The deuce!
'What on earth can I say to you? — nothing's of use.
'And the blame of the whole of your shocking behaviour
'Falls on *me*, sir! Come back, — do you hear? — or I leave your
'Affairs, and abjure you forever. Come back
'To your anxious betroth'd; and perplex'd
'COUSIN JACK.'

II.

Alfred needed, in truth, no entreaties from John
To increase his impatience to fly from Serchon.
All the place was now fraught with sensations of pain
Which, whilst in it, he strove to escape from in vain.
A wild instinct warn'd him to fly from a place
Where he felt that some fatal event, swift of pace,
Was approaching his life. In despite his endeavour
To think of Matilda, her image forever
Was effaced from his fancy by that of Lucile.
From the ground which he stood on he felt himself reel.
Scared, alarm'd by those feelings to which, on the day

Just before, all his heart had so soon given way,
When he caught, with a strange sense of fear, for assistance
At what was, till then, the great fact in existence,
'T was a phantom he grasp'd.

III.

Having sent for his guide,
He order'd his horse, and determin'd to ride
Back forthwith to Bigorre.
Then, the guide, who well knew
Every haunt of those hills, said the wild lake of Oo
Lay a league from Serchon; and suggested a track
By the lake to Bigorre, which, traversing the back
Of the mountain, avoided a circuit between
Two long valleys; and thinking, 'Perchance change of scene
'May create change of thought,' Alfred Vargrave agreed,
Mounted horse, and set forth to Bigorre at full speed.

IV.

His guide rode beside him.
The king of the guides!
The great Bernard himself! ever boldly he rides,
Ever gayly he sings! For to him, from of old,
The hills have confided their secrets, and told
Where the white partridge lies, and the cock o' the woods;
Where the izard flits fine through the cold solitudes;
Where the bear lurks *perdu;* and the lynx on his prey
At nightfall descends, when the mountains are gray;
Where the sassafras blooms, and the bluebell is born,
And the wild rhododendron first reddens at morn

Where the source of the waters is fine as a thread,
How the storm on the wild Maladetta is spread;
Where the thunder is hoarded, the snows lie asleep,
Whence the torrents are fed, and the cataracts leap;
And, familiarly known in the hamlets, the vales
Have whisper'd to him all their thousand love-tales;
He has laugh'd with the girls, he has leap'd with the boys;
Ever blithe, ever bold, ever boon, he enjoys
An existence untroubled by envy or strife,
While he feeds on the dews and the juices of life.
And so lightly he sings, and so gayly he rides,
For BERNÀRD LE SAUTEUR is the king of all guides!

V.

But Bernàrd found, that day, neither song nor love-tale,
Nor adventure, nor laughter, nor legend avail
To arouse from his deep and profound reverie
Him that silent beside him rode fast as could be.

VI.

Ascending the mountain they slacken'd their speed,
And the prospect that met them was wondrous indeed!
The breezy and pure inspirations of morn
Breath'd about them. The scarp'd ravaged mountains, all worn
By the torrents, whose course they watch'd faintly meander,
Were alive with the diamonded shy salamander.
They paused o'er the bosom of purple abysses,
And wound through a region of green wildernesses;
The waters went wirbling above and around.
The forests hung heap'd in their shadows profound.

Here the Larboust, and there Aventin, Castellon,
Which the Demon of Tempest, descending upon,
Had wasted with fire, and the peaceful Cazeaux
They mark'd; and far down in the sunshine below,
Half dipp'd in a valley of airiest blue,
The white happy homes of the village of Oo,
Where the age is yet golden.
And high over head
The wrecks of the combat of Titans were spread.
Red granite and quartz, in the alchemic sun,
Fused their splendours of crimson and crystal in one;
And deep in the moss gleam'd the delicate shells,
And the dew linger'd fresh in the heavy harebells;
The large violet burn'd; the campanula blue;
And Autumn's own flower, the saffron, peer'd through
The wild rhododendrons and thick sassafras;
And fragrant with thyme was the delicate grass;
And high up, and higher, and highest of all,
The secular phantom of snow!
O'er the wall
Of a deep and circuitous valley below,
That aerial spectre, reveal'd in the glow
Of the great golden dawn, hovers faint on the eye
And appears to grow in, and grow out of, the sky,
And plays with the fancy, and baffles the sight.
Only reach'd by the first rosy ripple of light,
And the cool star of eve, the Imperial Thing,
Half unreal, like some mythological king
That dominates all in a fable of old,
Takes command of a valley as fair to behold
As aught in old fables; and, seen or unseen,
Dwells aloof over all, in the vast and serene
Sacred sky, where the footsteps of spirits are furl'd
'Mid the clouds beyond which spreads the infinite world
Of man's last aspirations, — unfathom'd, untrod,
Save by Even and Morn, and the angels of God.

VII.

Meanwhile, as they journey'd, that serpentine road,
Now abruptly reversed, unexpectedly show'd
A gay cavalcade some few feet in advance.
Alfred Vargrave's heart beat; for he saw at a glance
The slight form of Lucile in the midst. His next look
Show'd him, joyously ambling beside her, the Duke.
The rest of the troop which had thus caught his ken
He knew not, nor noticed them (women and men).
They were laughing and talking together. Soon after
By his sudden appearance suspending their laughter,
He found himself close to Lucile.
She look'd scared.
A faint cry escaped her. Her horse slightly rear'd.

VIII.

'You here! . . . I imagined you far on your way
'To Bigorre!' . . . she exclaim'd. 'What has caused you to stay?'
'I *am* on my way to Bigorre,' he replied,
'But, since *my* way would seem to be *yours*, let me ride
'For one moment beside you.' And then, with a stoop,
At her ear, . . . 'and forgive me!'

IX.

By this time the troop
Had regather'd its numbers.
The Countess was pale
As the cloud 'neath their feet, on its way to the vale.

The Duke had observed it, nor quitted her side,
For even one moment, the whole of the ride.
Alfred smiled, as he thought 'he is jealous of her!'
And the thought of this jealousy added a spur
To his firm resolution and effort to please.
He talk'd much; he was witty, and quite at his ease.

X.

After noontide, the clouds, which had traversed the east
Half the day, gather'd closer, and rose and increased
The air changed and chill'd. As though out of the ground,
There ran up the trees a confused hissing sound,
And the wind rose. The guides sniff'd, like chamois, the air,
And look'd at each other, and halted, and there
Unbuckled the cloaks from the saddles. The white
Aspens rustled, and turn'd up their frail leaves in fright.
All announced the approach of the tempest.
Erelong,
Thick darkness descended the mountains among;
And a vivid, vindictive, and serpentine flash
Gored the darkness, and shore it across with a gash.
The rain fell in large, heavy drops. And anon
Broke the thunder.
The horses took fright, every one.
The Duke's in a moment was far out of sight.
The guides shouted. The band was obliged to alight;
And, dispersed up the perilous pathway, walk'd blind
To the darkness before from the darkness behind.

XI.

And the Storm is abroad in the mountains! He fills
The crouch'd hollows and all the oracular hills
With dread voices of power. A roused million or more
Of wild echoes reluctantly rise from their hoar
Immemorial ambush, and roll in the wake
Of the cloud, whose reflection leaves livid the lake.
And the wind, that wild robber, for plunder descends
From invisible lands, o'er those black mountain ends;
He howls as he hounds down his prey; and his lash
Tears the hair of the timorous wild mountain ash,
That clings to the rocks, with her garments all torn,
Like a woman in fear; then he blows his hoarse horn,
And is off, the fierce guide of destruction and terror,
Up the desolate heights, 'mid an intricate error
Of mountain and mist.

XII.

There is war in the skies! Lo! the black-winged legions of tempest arise
O'er those sharp splinter'd rocks that are gleaming below
In the soft light, so fair and so fatal, as though
Some seraph burn'd through them, the thunderbolt searching
Which the black cloud unbosom'd just now. Lo! the lurching
And shivering pine-trees, like phantoms, that seem
To waver above, in the dark; and yon stream,
How it hurries and roars, on its way to the white

And paralyzed lake there, appall'd at the sight
Of the things seen in heaven!

XIII.

Through the darkness and awe
That had gather'd around him, Lord Alfred now saw,
Reveal'd in the fierce and evanishing glare
Of the lightning that momently pulsed through the air,
A woman alone on a shelf of the hill,
With her cheek coldly propp'd on her hand, — and as still
As the rock that she sat on, which beetled above
The black lake beneath her.
All terror, all love
Added speed to the instinct with which he rush'd on.
For one moment the blue lightning swathed the whole stone
In its lurid embrace: like the sleek dazzling snake
That encircles a sorceress, charm'd for her sake
And lull'd by her loveliness; fawning, it play'd
And caressingly twined round the feet and the head
Of the woman who sat there, undaunted and calm
As the soul of that solitude, listing the psalm
Of the plangent and labouring tempest roll slow
From the caldron of midnight and vapour below.
Next moment, from bastion to bastion, all round,
Of the siege-circled mountains, there tumbled the sound
Of the battering thunder's indefinite peal,
And Lord Alfred had sprung to the feet of Lucile.

XIV.

She started. Once more, with its flickering wand,
The lightning approach'd her. In terror, her hand
Alfred Vargrave had seized within his; and he felt

The light fingers that coldly and lingeringly dwelt
In the grasp of his own, tremble faintly.
'See! see
'Where the whirlwind hath stricken and strangled
yon tree!'
She exclaimed, . . . 'like the passion that brings on
its breath,
'To the being it embraces, destruction and death!
'Alfred Vargrave, the lightning is round you!'
'Lucile!
'I hear — I see — naught but yourself. I can feel
'Nothing here but your presence. My pride fights
in vain
'With the truth that leaps from me. We two meet
again
''Neath yon terrible heaven that is watching above
'To avenge if I lie when I swear that I love, —
'And beneath yonder terrible heaven, at your feet,
'I humble my head and my heart. I entreat
'Your pardon, Lucile, for the past — I implore
'For the future your mercy — implore it with more
'Of passion than prayer ever breath'd. By the
power
'Which invisibly touches us both in this hour,
'By the rights I have o'er you, Lucile, I demand' —

'The rights!' . . . said Lucile, and drew from him
her hand.

'Yes, the rights! for what greater to man may
belong
'Than the right to repair in the future the wrong
'To the past? and the wrong I have done you, of
yore,
'Hath bequeathed to me all the sad right to restore,
'To retrieve, to amend! I, who injured your
life,
'Urge the right to repair it, Lucile! Be my wife,
'My guide, my good angel, my all upon earth,

'And accept, for the sake of what yet may give worth
'To my life, its contrition!'

XV.

He paused, for there came
O'er the cheek of the Countess a flush like the flame
That illumin'd at moments the darkness o'erhead.
With a voice faint and marr'd by emotion, she said,
'And your pledge to another?'

XVI.

'Hush, hush!' he exclaim'd,
'My honour will live where my love lives, unshamed.
''T were poor honour indeed, to another to give
'That life of which *you* keep the heart. Could I live
'In the light of those young eyes, suppressing a lie?
'Alas, no! *your* hand holds my whole destiny.
'I can never recall what my lips have avow'd!
'In your love lies whatever can render me proud.
'For the great crime of all my existence hath been
'To have known you in vain. And the duty best seen,
'And most hallow'd — the duty most sacred and sweet
'Is that which hath led me, Lucile, to your feet.
'O speak! and restore me the blessing I lost
'When I lost you — my pearl of all pearls beyond cost!
'And restore to your own life its youth, and restore
'The vision, the rapture, the passion of yore!
'Ere our brows had been dimm'd in the dust of the world,
'When our souls their white wings yet exulting unfurl'd!

'For your eyes rest no more on the unquiet man,
'The wild star of whose course its pale orbit out-
ran,
'Whom the formless, indefinite future of youth,
'With its lying allurements, distracted. In truth
'I have wearily wander'd the world, and I feel
'That the least of your lovely regards, O Lucile,
'Is worth all the world can afford, and the dream
'Which, though follow'd forever, forever doth
seem
'As fleeting, and distant, and dim, as of yore
'When it brooded in twilight, at dawn, on the shore
'Of life's untraversed ocean! I know the sole
path
'To repose which my desolate destiny hath
'Is the path by whose course to your feet I return.
'And who else, O Lucile, will so truly discern,
'And so deeply revere, all the passionate strength,
'The sublimity in you, as he whom at length
'These have saved from himself, for the truth they
reveal
'To his worship?'

XVII.

She spoke not; but Alfred could feel
The light hand and arm, that upon him reposed,
Thrill and tremble. Those dark eyes of hers were
half closed;
But, under their languid, mysterious fringe,
A passionate softness was beaming. One tinge
Of faint inward fire flush'd transparently through
The delicate, pallid, and pure olive hue
Of the cheek, half averted and droop'd. The rich
bosom
Heaved, as when in the heart of a ruffled rose-
blossom
A bee is imprison'd, and struggles.

XVIII.

Meanwhile
The sun, in his setting, sent up the last smile
Of his power, to baffle the storm. And, behold!
O'er the mountains embattled, his armies, all gold,
Rose and rested: while far up the dim airy crags,
Its artillery silenced, its banners in rags,
The rear of the tempest its sullen retreat
Drew off slowly, receding in silence, to meet
The powers of the night, which, now gathering afar,
Had already sent forward one bright, single star.
The curls of her soft and luxuriant hair,
From the dark riding-hat, which Lucile used to wear,
Had escaped; and Lord Alfred now cover'd with kisses
The redolent warmth of those long falling tresses.
Neither he, nor Lucile, felt the rain, which not yet
Had ceased falling around them; when, splash'd, drench'd, and wet,
The Duc de Luvois down the rough mountain course
Approach'd them as fast as the road, and his horse,
Which was limping, would suffer. The beast had just now
Lost his footing, and over the perilous brow
Of the storm-haunted mountain his master had thrown;
But the Duke, who was agile, had leap'd to a stone,
And the horse, being bred to the instinct which fills
The breast of the wild mountaineer in these hills,
Had scrambled again to his feet; and now master
And horse bore about them the signs of disaster,
As they heavily footed their way through the mist,

The horse with his shoulder, the Duke with his wrist,
Bruised and bleeding.

XIX.

If ever your feet, like my own,
O reader, have travers'd these mountains alone,
Have you felt your identity shrink and contract
At the sound of the distant and dim cataract,
In the presence of nature's immensities? Say,
Have you hung o'er the torrent, bedew'd with its spray,
And, leaving the rock-way, contorted and roll'd,
Like a huge couchant Typhon, fold heap'd over fold,
Track'd the summits, from which every step that you tread
Rolls the loose stones, with thunder below, to the bed
Of invisible waters, whose mystical sound
Fills with awful suggestions the dizzy profound?
And, labouring onwards, at last through a break
In the walls of the world, burst at once on the lake?

If you have, this description I might have withheld.
You remember how strangely your bosom has swell'd
At the vision reveal'd. On the overwork'd soil
Of this planet, enjoyment is sharpen'd by toil;
And one seems, by the pain of ascending the height,
To have conquer'd a claim to that wonderful sight.

XX.

Hail, virginal daughter of cold Espingo!
Hail, Naiad, whose realm is the cloud and the snow!
For o'er thee the angels have whiten'd their wings,

And the thirst of the seraphs is quench'd at thy springs.
What hand hath, in heaven, upheld thine expanse?
When the breath of creation first fashion'd fair France,
Did the Spirit of Ill, in his downthrow appalling,
Bruise the world, and thus hollow thy basin while falling?
Ere the mammoth was born hath some monster unnamed
The base of thy mountainous pedestal framed?
And later, when Power to Beauty was wed,
Did some delicate fairy embroider thy bed
With the fragile valerian and wild columbine?

XXI.

But thy secret thou keepest, and I will keep mine;
For once, gazing on thee, it flash'd on my soul,
All that secret! I saw in a vision the whole
Vast design of the ages; what was and shall be!
Hands unseen raised the veil of a great mystery
For one moment. I saw, and I heard; and my heart
Bore witness within me to infinite art,
In infinite power proving infinite love;
Caught the great choral chant, mark'd the dread pageant move —
The divine Whence and Whither of life! But, O daughter
Of Oo, not more safe in the deep, silent water
Is thy secret, than mine in my heart. Even so.
What I then saw and heard the world never shall know.

XXII.

The dimness of eve o'er the valleys had closed,
The rain had ceased falling, the mountains reposed.
The stars had enkindled in luminous courses
Their slow-sliding lamps, when, remounting their horses,

The riders re-travers'd that mighty serration
Of rockwork. Thus left to its own desolation,
The lake, from whose glimmering limits the last
Transient pomp of the pageants of sunset had
pass'd,
Drew into its bosom the darkness, and only
Admitted within it one image — a lonely
And tremulous phantom of flickering light
That follow'd the mystical moon through the night.

XXIII.

It was late when o'er Serchon at last they de-
scended.
To her châlet, in silence, Lord Alfred attended
The Countess. At parting she whisper'd him low,
'You have made to me, Alfred, an offer I know
'All the worth of, believe me. I cannot reply
'Without time for reflection. Good night! — not
good by.'

'Alas! 't is the very same answer you made
'To the Duc de Luvois but a day since,' he said.

'No, Alfred! the very same, no,' she replied.
Her voice shook. 'If you love me, obey me.
Abide
'My answer, to-morrow.'

XXIV.

Alas, cousin Jack!
You Cassandra in breeches and boots! turn your
back
To the ruins of Troy. Prophet, seek not for glory
Amongst thine own people.
I follow my story.

CANTO V.

I.

Up!—forth again, Pegasus!—'Many's the slip,'
Hath the proverb well said, ''twixt the cup and the lip!'
How blest should we be, have I often conceived,
Had we really achieved what we nearly achieved!
We but catch at the skirts of the thing we would be,
And fall back on the lap of a false destiny.
So it will be, so has been, since this world began!
And the happiest, noblest, and best part of man
Is the part which he never hath fully play'd out:
For the first and last word in life's volume is—Doubt.
The face the most fair to our vision allow'd
Is the face we encounter and lose in the crowd.
The thought that most thrills our existence is one
Which, before we can frame it in language, is gone.
O Horace! the rustic still rests by the river,
But the river flows on, and flows past him forever!
Who can sit down, and say . . . 'What I will be, I will'?
Who stand up, and affirm . . . 'What I was, I am still'?
Who is it that must not, if question'd, say . . . 'What
'I would have remain'd, or become, I am not'?
We are ever behind, or beyond, or beside
Our intrinsic existence. Forever at hide
And seek with our souls. Not in Hades alone
Doth Sisyphus roll, ever frustrate, the stone,
Do the Danaïds ply, ever vainly, the sieve.
Tasks as futile does earth to its denizens give.

Yet there's none so unhappy but what he hath been
Just about to be happy at some time, I ween;
And none so beguiled and defrauded by chance,
But what, once in his life, some minute circumstance
Would have fully sufficed to secure him the bliss
Which, missing it then, he forever must miss.
And to most of us, ere we go down to the grave,
Life, relenting, accords the good gift we would have;
But, as though by some strange imperfection in fate,
The good gift, when it comes, comes a moment too late.
The Future's great veil our breath fitfully flaps,
And behind it broods ever the mighty Perhaps.
Yes! there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip;
But while o'er the brim of life's beaker I dip,
Though the cup may next moment be shatter'd, the wine
Spilt, one deep health I'll pledge, and that health shall be thine,
O being of beauty and bliss! seen and known
In the deeps of my soul, and possess'd there alone!
My days know thee not; and my lips name thee never.
Thy place in my poor life is vacant forever.
We have met: we have parted. No more is recorded
In my annals on earth. This alone was afforded
To the man whom men know me, or deem me, to be.
But, far down, in the depths of my life's mystery,
(Like the siren that under the deep ocean dwells,
Whom the wind as it wails, and the wave as it swells,
Cannot stir in the calm of her coralline halls,
'Mid the world's adamantine and dim pedestals;

At whose feet sit the sylphs and sea fairies; for whom
The almandine glimmers, the soft samphires bloom) —
Thou abidest and reignest for ever, O Queen
Of that better world which thou swayest unseen!
My one perfect mistress! my all things in all!
Thee by no vulgar name known to men do I call:
For the seraphs have named thee to me in my sleep,
And that name is a secret I sacredly keep.
But, wherever this nature of mine is most fair,
And its thoughts are the purest — belov'd, thou art there!
And whatever is noblest in aught that I do,
Is done to exalt and to worship thee too.
The world gave thee not to me, no! and the world
Cannot take thee away from me now. I have furl'd
The wings of my spirit about thy bright head;
At thy feet are my soul's immortalities spread.
Thou mightest have been to me much. Thou art more.
And in silence I worship, in darkness adore.
If life be not that which without us we find —
Chance, accident, merely — but rather the mind,
And the soul which, within us, surviveth these things,
If our real existence have truly its springs
Less in that which we do than in that which we feel,
Not in vain do I worship, not hopeless I kneel!
For then, though I name thee not mistress or wife,
Thou art mine — and mine only, — O life of my life!
And though many 's the slip 'twixt the cup and the lip,
Yet while o'er the brim of life's beaker I dip,

While there 's life on the lip, while there s warmth
in the wine,
One deep health I 'll pledge, and that health shall
be thine!

II.

This world, on whose peaceable breast we repose
Unconvulsed by alarm, once confused in the throes
Of a tumult divine, sea and land, moist and dry,
And in fiery fusion commix'd earth and sky.
Time cool'd it, and calm'd it, and taught it to go
The round of its orbit in peace, long ago.
The wind changeth and whirleth continually:
All the rivers run down and run into the sea:
The wind whirleth about, and is presently still'd:
All the rivers run down, yet the sea is not fill'd:
The sun goeth forth from his chambers: the sun
Ariseth, and lo! he descendeth anon.
All returns to its place. Use and Habit are powers
Far stronger than Passion, in this world of ours.
The great laws of life readjust their infraction,
And to every emotion appoint a reaction.

III.

Alfred Vargrave had time, after leaving Lucile,
To review the rash step he had taken, and feel
What the world would have call'd '*his erroneous
position.*'
Thought obtruded its claim, and enforced recogni-
tion:
Like a creditor who, when the gloss is worn out
On the coat which we once wore with pleasure no
doubt,
Sends us in his account for the garment we bought.
Ev'ry spendthrift to passion is debtor to thought.

IV.

He felt ill at ease with himself. He could feel
Little doubt what the answer would be from Lucile.

Her eyes, when they parted — her voice, when they met,
Still enraptured his heart, which they haunted. And yet,
Though, exulting, he deem'd himself loved, where he loved,
Through his mind a vague self-accusation there moved.
O'er his fancy, when fancy was fairest, would rise
The infantine face of Matilda, with eyes
So sad, so reproachful, so cruelly kind,
That his heart fail'd within him. In vain did he find
A thousand just reasons for what he had done:
The vision that troubled him would not be gone.
In vain did he say to himself, and with truth,
'Matilda has beauty, and fortune, and youth;
'And her heart is too young to have deeply involved
'All its hopes in the tie which must now be dissolved.
''T were a false sense of honour in me to suppress
'The sad truth which I owe it to her to confess.
'And what reason have I to presume this poor life
'Of my own, with its languid and frivolous strife,
'And without what alone might endear it to her,
'Were a boon all so precious, indeed, to confer,
'That a woman need weep to resign it? 'T will be
'The brief, angry surprise of a moment, and she,
'Who can never lack suitors more worthy than I,
'In a year will recall, without even a sigh,
'This broken engagement.
'It is not as though
'I were bound to some poor village maiden, I know,
'Unto whose simple heart mine were all upon earth,
'Or to whose simple fortunes my own could give worth.

'Matilda, in all the world's gifts, will not miss
'Aught that I could procure her. 'T is best as it is!'

V.

In vain did he say to himself, 'When I came
'To this fatal spot, I had nothing to blame
'Or reproach myself for in the thoughts of my heart.
'I could not foresee that its pulses would start
'Into such strange emotion on seeing once more
'A woman I left with indifference before.
'I believed, and with honest conviction believed,
'In my love for Matilda. I never conceived
'That another could shake it. I deem'd I had done
'With the wild heart of youth, and look'd hopefully on
'To the soberer manhood, the worthier life,
'Which I sought in the love that I vow'd to my wife.
'Poor child! she shall learn the whole truth. She shall know
'What I knew not myself but a few days ago.
'The world will console her — her pride will support —
'Her youth will renew its emotions. In short,
'There is nothing in me that Matilda will miss
'When once we have parted. 'T is best as it is!

VI.

But in vain did he reason and argue. Alas!
He yet felt unconvinced that *'t was* best as it was.
Out of reach of all reason, forever would rise
That infantine face of Matilda, with eyes
So sad, so reproachful, so cruelly kind,
That they harrow'd his heart and distracted his mind.

VII.

And then, when he turn'd from these thoughts to Lucile,
Though his heart rose enraptured, he could not but feel
A vague sense of awe of her nature. Behind
All the beauty of heart, and the graces of mind,
Which he saw and revered in her, something unknown
And unseen in her nature still troubled his own.
He felt that Lucile penetrated and prized
Whatever was noblest and best, though disguised,
In himself; but he did not feel sure that he knew,
Or completely possess'd, what, half-hidden from view,
Remain'd lofty and lonely in *her*.
Then, her life,
So untamed, and so free! would she yield, as a wife,
Independence, long claim'd as a woman? Her name,
So link'd by the world with that spurious fame
Which the beauty and wit of a woman assert,
In some measure, alas! to her own loss and hurt
In the serious thoughts of a man! .... This reflection
O'er the love which he felt cast a shade of dejection,
From which he forever escaped to the thought
Doubt could reach not .... 'I love her and all else is naught!'

VIII.

His hand trembled strangely in breaking the seal
Of the letter which reach'd him at last from Lucile.
At the sight of the very first word that he read,
That letter dropp'd down from his hand like the dead

Leaf in autumn, that, falling, leaves naked and bare
A desolate tree in a wide wintry air.
He pass'd his hand hurriedly over his eyes,
Bewilder'd, incredulous. Angry surprise
And dismay, in one sharp moan, broke from him. Anon
He pick'd up the page, and read rapidly on.

IX.

THE COMTESSE DE NEVERS TO LORD ALFRED VARGRAVE.

'No, Alfred!
'If over the present, when last
'We two met, rose the glamour and mist of the past,
'It hath now roll'd away, and our two paths are plain,
'And those two paths divide us.
'That hand which again
'Mine one moment hath clasp'd, as the hand of a brother,
'That hand and your honour are pledged to another!
'Forgive, Alfred Vargrave, forgive me, if yet
'For that moment (now past!) I have made you forget
'What was due to yourself and that other one. Yes,
'Mine the fault, and be mine the repentance! Not less,
'In now owning this fault, Alfred, let me own, too,
'I foresaw not the sorrow involved in it.
'True,
'That meeting, which hath been so fatal, I sought,
'I alone! But, oh, deem not it was with the thought
'Or your heart to regain, or the past to rewaken.

'No! believe me, it was with the firm and unshaken
'Conviction, at least, that our meeting would be
'Without peril to *you*, although haply to me
'The salvation of all my existence.
'I own,
'When the rumour first reach'd me, which lightly made known
'To the world your engagement, my heart and my mind
'Suffer'd torture intense. It was cruel to find
'That so much of the life of my life, half unknown
'To myself, had been silently settled on one
'Upon whom but to think it would soon be a crime.
'Then I said to myself, "From the thraldom which time
'"Hath not weaken'd there rests but one hope of escape.
'"That image which Fancy seems ever to shape
'"From the solitude left round the ruins of yore,
'"Is a phantom. The Being I loved is no more.
'"What I hear in the silence, and see in the lone
'"Void of life, is the young hero born of my own
'"Perish'd youth: and his image, serene and sublime,
'"In my heart rests unconscious of change and of time.
'"Could I see it but once more, as time and as change
'"Have made it, a thing unfamiliar and strange,
'"See, indeed, that the Being I loved in my youth
'"Is no more, and what rests now is only, in truth,
'"The hard pupil of life and the world: then, oh, then,
'"I should wake from a dream, and my life be again
"Reconciled to the world; and, released from regret,

'"Take the lot fate accords to my choice."
'So we met.
'But the danger I did not foresee has occurr'd.
'The danger, alas, to yourself! I have err'd.
'But happy for both that this error hath been
'Discover'd as soon as the danger was seen!
'We meet, Alfred Vargrave, no more. I, indeed,
'Shall be far from Serchon when this letter you read.
'My course is decided; my path I discern:
'Doubt is over; my future is fix'd now.
'Return.
'O return to the young living love! Whence, alas!
'If, one moment, you wander'd, think only it was
'More deeply to bury the past love.
'And, oh!
'Believe, Alfred Vargrave, that I, where I go
'On my far distant pathway through life, shall rejoice
'To treasure in memory all that your voice
'Has avow'd to me, all in which others have clothed
'To my fancy with beauty and worth your betrothed!
'In the fair morning light, in the orient dew
'Of that young life, now yours, can you fail to renew
'All the noble and pure aspirations, the truth,
'The freshness, the faith, of your own earnest youth?
'Yes! *you* will be happy. I, too, in the bliss
'I foresee for you, I shall be happy. And this
'Proves me worthy your friendship. And so — let it prove
'That I cannot — I do not — respond to your love.
'Yes, indeed be convinced that I could not (no, no,
'Never, never!) have render'd you happy. And so,

'Rest assured that, if false to the vows you have plighted,
'You would have endured, when the first brief, excited
'Emotion was o'er, not alone the remorse
'Of honour, but also (to render it worse)
'Disappointed affection.
'Yes, Alfred; you start?
But think! if the world was too much in your heart,
'And too little in mine, when we parted ten years
Ere this last fatal meeting, that time (ay, and tears!)
'Have but deepen'd the old demarcations which then
'Placed our natures asunder; and we two again,
'As we then were, would still have been strangely at strife.
'In that self-independence which is to my life
'Its necessity now, as it once was its pride,
'Had our course through the world been henceforth side by side,
'I should have revolted forever, and shock'd,
'Your respect for the world's plausibilities, mock'd,
'Without meaning to do so, and outraged, all those
'Social creeds which you live by.
'Oh! do not suppose
'That I blame you. Perhaps it is you that are right.
'Best, then, all as it is!
'Deem these words life's Good-night
'To the hope of a moment: no more! If there fell
'Any tear on this page, 't was a friend's.
'So farewell
'To the past — and to you, Alfred Vargrave.
'LUCILE.'

X.

So ended that letter.
The room seem'd to reel
Round and round in the mist that was scorching his eyes
With a fiery dew. Grief, resentment, surprise,
Seem'd to choke him; each word he had read, as it smote
Down some hope, seem'd to grasp, like a hand, at his throat,
And stifle and strangle him.
Gasping already
For relief from himself, with a footstep unsteady,
He pass'd from his chamber. He felt both oppress'd
And excited. The letter he thrust in his breast,
And, in search of fresh air and of solitude, pass'd
The long lime-trees of Serchon. His footsteps at last
Reach'd a bare narrow heath by the skirts of a wood:
It was sombre and silent, and suited his mood.
By a mineral spring, long unused, now unknown,
Stood a small ruin'd abbey. He reach'd it, sat down
On a fragment of stone, 'mid the wild weed and thistle,
And read over again that perplexing epistle.

XI.

In re-reading that letter, there roll'd from his mind
The raw mist of resentment which first made him blind
To the pathos breath'd thro' it. Tears rose in his eyes,
And a hope sweet and strange in his heart seem'd to rise.
The truth which he saw not the first time he read

That letter, he now saw — that each word betray'd
The love which the writer had sought to conceal.
His love was received not, he could not but feel,
For one reason alone, — that his love was not free.
True! free yet he was not: but could he not be
Free erelong, free as air to revoke that farewell,
And to sanction his own hopes? he had but to tell
The truth to Matilda, and she were the first
To release him: he had but to wait at the worst.
Matilda's relations would probably snatch
Any pretext, with pleasure, to break off a match
In which they had yielded, alone at the whim
Of their spoil'd child, a languid approval to him.
She herself, careless child! was her love for him aught
Save the first joyous fancy succeeding the thought
She last gave to her doll? was she able to feel
Such a love as the love he divined in Lucile?
He would seek her, obtain his release, and, oh! then,
He had but to fly to Lucile, and again
Claim the love which his heart would be free to command.
But to press on Lucile any claim to her hand,
Or even to seek, or to see her, before
He could say, 'I am free! free, Lucile, to implore
'That great blessing on life you alone can confer,'
'T were dishonour in him, 't would be insult to her.
Thus, still with the letter outspread on his knee
He follow'd so fondly his own reverie,
That he felt not the angry regard of a man
Fix'd upon him; he saw not a face stern and wan
Turn'd towards him; he heard not a footstep that pass'd
And repass'd the lone spot where he stood, till at last
A hoarse voice aroused him.

He look'd up, and saw,
On the bare heath before him, the Duc de Luvois.

XII.

With aggressive ironical tones, and a look
Of concentrated insolent challenge, the Duke
Address'd to Lord Alfred some sneering allusion
To 'the doubtless sublime reveries his intrusion
'Had, he fear'd, interrupted. Milord would do better,
'He fancied, however, to fold up a letter
'The writing of which was too well known, in fact,
'His remark as he pass'd to have fail'd to attract.'

XIII.

It was obvious to Alfred the Frenchman was bent
Upon picking a quarrel; and doubtless 't was meant
From *him* to provoke it by sneers such as these.
A moment sufficed his quick instinct to seize
The position. He felt that he could not expose
His own name, or Lucile's, or Matilda's, to those
Idle tongues that would bring down upon him the ban
Of the world, if he now were to fight with this man.
And indeed, when he look'd in the Duke's haggard face,
He was pain'd by the change there he could not but trace.
And he almost felt pity.
He therefore put by
Each remark from the Duke with some careless reply,
And coldly, but courteously, waving away
The ill-humour the Duke seem'd resolved to display,
Rose, and turn'd, with a stern salutation, aside.

XIV.

Then the Duke put himself in the path, made one stride
In advance, raised a hand, fix'd upon him his eyes,
And said . . .
'Hold, Lord Alfred! Away with disguise!
'I will own that I sought you a moment ago,
'To fix on you a quarrel. I still can do so
'Upon any excuse. I prefer to be frank.
'I admit not a rival in fortune or rank
'To the hand of a woman, whatever be hers
'Or her suitor's. I love the Comtesse de Nevers.
'I believed, ere you cross'd me, and still have the right
'To believe, that she would have been mine. To her sight
'You return, and the woman is suddenly changed.
'You step in between us: her heart is estranged.
'You! who now are betroth'd to another, I know:
'You! whose name with Lucile's nearly ten years ago
'Was coupled by ties which you broke: you! the man
'I reproach'd on the day our acquaintance began:
'You! that left her so lightly, — I cannot believe
'That you love, as I love, her; nor can I conceive
'You, indeed, have the right so to love her.
'Milord,
'I will not thus tamely concede, at your word,
'What, a few days ago, I believed to be mine!
'I shall yet persevere: I shall yet be, in fine,
'A rival you dare not despise. It is plain
'That to settle this contest there can but remain
One way — need I say what it is?'

XV.

Not unmoved
With regretful respect for the earnestness proved
By the speech he had heard, Alfred Vargrave replied
In words which he trusted might yet turn aside
The quarrel from which he felt bound to abstain,
And, with stately urbanity, strove to explain
To the Duke that he too (a fair rival at worst!)
Had not been accepted.

XVI.

'Accepted! say first
'Are you free to have offer'd?'
Lord Alfred was mute.

XVII.

'Ah, you dare not reply!' cried the Duke. 'Why dispute,
'Why palter with me? you are silent! and why?
'Because, in your conscience, you cannot deny
''T was from vanity, wanton and cruel withal,
'And the wish an ascendency lost to recall,
'That you stepp'd in between me and her. If, milord,
'You be really sincere, I ask only one word.
'Say at once you renounce her. At once, on my part,
'I will ask your forgiveness with all truth of heart,
'And there *can* be no quarrel between us. Say on!'
Lord Alfred grew gall'd and impatient. This tone
Roused a strong irritation he could not repress.
'You have not the right, sir,' he said, 'and still less
'The power, to make terms and conditions with me.
I refuse to reply.'

XVIII.

As diviners may see
Fates they cannot avert in some figure occult,
He foresaw in a moment each evil result
Of the quarrel now imminent.
There, face to face,
'Mid the ruins and tombs of a long-perish'd race,
With, for witness, the stern Autumn Sky overhead,
And beneath them, unnoticed, the graves, and the dead,
Those two men had met, as it were on the ridge
Of that perilous, narrow, invisible bridge,
Dividing the Past from the Future, so small
That, if one should pass over, the other must fall.

XIX.

On the ear, at that moment, the sound of a hoof,
Urged with speed, sharply smote; and from under the roof
Of the forest in view, where the skirts of it verged
On the heath where they stood, at full gallop emerged
A horseman.
A guide he appear'd, by the sash
Of red silk round the waist, and the long leathern lash
With the short wooden handle, slung crosswise behind
The short jacket; the loose canvas trouser, confined
By the long boots; the woollen capote; and the rein,
A mere hempen cord on a curb.
Up the plain
He wheel'd his horse, white with the foam on his flank,
Leap'd the rivulet lightly, turn'd sharp from the bank,

And, approaching the Duke, raised his woollen
capote,
Bow'd low in the selle, and deliver'd a note.

XX.

The two men stood astonish'd. The Duke, with a
gest
Of apology, turn'd, stretch'd his hand, and pos-
sess'd
Himself of the letter, chang'd colour, and tore
The page open, and read.
Ere a moment was o'er
His whole aspect changed. A light rose to his
eyes,
And a smile to his lips. While with startled sur-
prise
Lord Alfred yet watch'd him, he turn'd on his
heel,
And said gayly, 'A pressing request from Lucile!
'You are quite right, Lord Alfred! fair rivals at
worst,
'Our relative place may perchance be reversed.
'You are not accepted — not free to propose!
'I, perchance, am accepted already; who knows?
'I had warn'd you, milord, I should still persevere.
'This letter — but stay! you can read it — look
here!'

XXI.

It was now Alfred's turn to feel roused and en-
raged.
But Lucile to himself was not pledged or engaged
By aught that could sanction resentment. He said
Not a word, but turn'd round, took the letter, and
read . . .

THE COMTESSE DE NEVERS TO THE DUC DE LUVOIS.

'Saint Saviour.

'Your letter, which follow'd me here, makes me stay
'Till I see you again. With no moment's delay
'I entreat, I conjure you, by all that you feel
'Or profess, to come to me directly.

'LUCILE.'

XXII.

'Your letter!' He then had been writing to her!
Coldly shrugging his shoulders, Lord Alfred said, 'Sir,
'Do not let me detain you!'

The Duke smiled and bow'd;
Placed the note in his bosom; address'd, half aloud,
A few words to the messenger. . . 'Say your despatch
'Will be answer'd ere nightfall'; then glanced at his watch,
And turn'd back to the Baths.

XXIII.

Alfred Vargrave stood still,
Torn, distracted in heart, and divided in will.
He turn'd to Lucile's farewell letter to him,
And read over her words; rising tears made them dim;
'*Doubt is over: my future is fix'd now*,' they said,
My course is decided.' Her course? what! to wed
With this insolent rival! With that thought there shot
Through his heart an acute jealous anguish. But not

Even thus could his clear worldly sense quite excuse
Those strange words to the Duke. She was free to refuse
Himself, free the Duke to accept, it was true:
Even then though, this eager and strange rendezvous
How imprudent! To some unfrequented lone inn,
And so late (for the night was about to begin) —
She, companionless there! — had she bidden that man?
A fear, vague, and formless, and horrible, ran
Through his heart.

XXIV.

At that moment he look'd up, and saw,
Riding fast through the forest, the Duc de Luvois,
Who waved his hand to him, and sped out of sight.
The day was descending. He felt 't would be night
Ere that man reach'd Saint Saviour.

XXV.

He walk'd on, but not
Back toward Serchon: he walk'd on, but knew not in what
Direction, nor yet with what object, indeed,
He was walking; but still he walk'd on without heed.

XXVI.

The day had been sullen; but, towards his decline,
The sun sent a stream of wild light up the pine.
Darkly denting the red light reveal'd at its back,
The old ruin'd abbey rose roofless and black.
The spring that yet oozed through the moss-paven floor

Had suggested, no doubt, to the monks there, of yore,
The site of that refuge where, back to its God
How many a heart, now at rest 'neath the sod,
Had borne from the world all the same wild unrest
That now prey'd on his own!

XXVII.

By the thoughts in his breast
With varying impulse divided and torn,
He traversed the scant heath, and reach'd the forlorn
Autumn woodland, in which but a short while ago
He had seen the Duke rapidly enter; and so
He too enter'd. The light waned around him, and pass'd
Into darkness. The wrathful, red Occident cast
One glare of vindictive inquiry behind,
As the last light of day from the high wood declined,
And the great forest sigh'd its farewell to the beam,
And far off on the stillness the voice of the stream
Fell faintly.

XXVIII.

O Nature, how fair is thy face,
And how light is thy heart, and how friendless thy grace!
Thou false mistress of man! thou dost sport with him lightly
In his hours of ease and enjoyment; and brightly
Dost thou smile to his smile; to his joys thou inclinest,
But his sorrows, thou knowest them not, nor divinest.
While he woos, thou art wanton; thou lettest him love thee;
But thou art not his friend, for his grief canst not move thee.

And at last, when he sickens and dies, what dost thou?
All as gay are thy garments, as careless thy brow,
And thou laughest and toyest with any new-comer,
Not a tear more for winter, a smile less for summer!
Hast thou never an anguish to heave the heart under
That fair breast of thine, O thou feminine wonder!
For all those — the young, and the fair, and the strong,
Who have loved thee, and lived with thee gayly and long,
And who now on thy bosom lie dead? and their deeds
And their days are forgotten! O hast thou no weeds
And not one year of mourning, — one out of the many
That deck thy new bridals forever, — nor any
Regrets for thy lost loves, conceal'd from the new,
O thou widow of earth's generations? Go to!
If the sea and the night-wind know aught of these things,
They do not reveal it. We are not thy kings.

CANTO VI

I.

'THE huntsman has ridden too far on the chase,
'And eltrich, and eerie, and strange is the place!
'The castle betokens a date long gone by.
'He crosses the courtyard with curious eye:
'He wanders from chamber to chamber, and yet
'From strangeness to strangeness his footsteps are set;
'And the whole place grows wilder, and wilder, and less
'Like aught seen before. Each in obsolete dress,
'Strange portraits regard him with looks of surprise;
'Strange forms from the arras start forth to his eyes;
'Strange epigraphs, blazon'd, burn out of the wall:
'The spell of a wizard is over it all.
'In her chamber, enchanted, the Princess is sleeping.
'The sleep which for centuries she has been keeping.
'If she smile in her sleep, it must be to some lover
'Whose lost golden locks the long grasses now cover:
'If she moan in her dream, it must be to deplore
'Some grief which the world cares to hear of no more.
'But how fair is her forehead, how calm seems her cheek!
'And how sweet must that voice be, if once she would speak!
'He looks and he loves her; but knows he (not he!)
'The clew to unravel this old mystery?

'And he stoops to those shut lips. The shapes on the wall,
'The mute men in armour around him, and all
'The weird figures frown, as tho' striving to say,
'"*Halt! invade not the Past, reckless child of To-day!*
'"*And give not, O madman! the heart in thy breast*
'"*To a phantom, the soul of whose sense is possess'd*
'"*By an Age not thine own!*"
'But unconscious is he,
'And he heeds not the warning, he cares not to see
'Aught but *one* form before him!
'Rash, wild words are o'er;
'And the vision is vanish'd from sight evermore!
'And the gray morning sees, as it drearily moves
'O'er a land long deserted, a madman that roves
'Through a ruin, and seeks to recapture a dream.
'Lost to life and its uses, withdrawn from the scheme
'Of man's waking existence, he wanders apart.'
And this is an old fairy-tale of the heart.
It is told in all lands, in a different tongue;
Told with tears by the old, heard with smiles by the young.
And the tale to each heart unto which it is known
Has a different sense. It has puzzled my own.

II.

Eugène de Luvois was a man who, in part
From strong physical health, and that vigour of heart
Which physical health gives, and partly, perchance,
From a generous vanity native to France,
Threw himself, heart and soul, into all that allured
Or engaged his sensations; nor ever endured
To relinquish to failure whate'er he began,
Or accept any rank, save the foremost.
A man
Of action by nature, he might have, no doubt,

Been in some sense a great man, had life but laid
out
Any great field of action for him, or conceded
To action a really great aim, such as needed
Faith, patience, self-sacrifice.
But, on the whole,
From circumstance partly beyond his control,
His life was of trifles made up, and he lived
In a world of frivolities. Still he contrived
The trifles, to which he was wedded, to dower
With so much of his own individual power
(And mere pastime to him was so keen a pursuit),
That these trifles seem'd such as you scarce could
impute
To a trifler.
Both he and Lord Alfred had been
Men of pleasure: but men's pleasant vices, which,
seen
In Alfred, appear'd, from the light, languid mood
Of soft unconcern with which these were pursued,
As amiable foibles, by strange involution,
In Eugène, from their earnest, intense prosecution,
Appear'd almost criminal.
Nevertheless,
What in him gave to vice, from its pathos and
stress,
A sort of malignity, might have perchance
Had the object been changed by transposed cir-
cumstance,
Given vigour to virtue. And therefore, indeed,
Had his life been allied to some fix'd moral creed,
In the practice and forms of a rigid, severe,
And ascetic religion, he might have come near
To each saint in that calendar which he now
spurn'd.
In its orbit, however, his intellect turn'd
On a circle so narrow'd as quite to exclude
A spacious humanity. Therefore, both crude
And harsh his religion would ever have been,

As shallow, presumptuous, narrow, and keen,
Was the trite irreligion which now he display'd.
It depended alone upon chance to have made
Persecutor of this man, or martyr. For, closed
In the man, lurk'd two natures the world deems opposed,
A Savonarola's, a Calvin's, alike
Unperceived by himself. It was in him to strike
At whatever the object he sought to attain,
Bold as Brutus, relentless as Philip of Spain,
And undaunted to march, in behalf of his brothers
To the stake, or to light it, remorseless, for others.
The want of his life was the great want, in fact,
Of a principle, less than of power to act
Upon principle. Life without one living truth!
To the sacred political creed of his youth
The century which he was born to denied
All realization. Its generous pride
To degenerate protest on all things was sunk;
Its principles, each to a prejudice shrunk.
And thus from his youth he had lived, in constrain'd
Vain resistance, opposed to the race that then reign'd
In the land of his birth, and from this cause alone
Exiled from his due sphere of action, and thrown
Into reckless inertness, whence, early possess'd
Of inherited wealth, he had learn'd to invest
Both his wealth and those passions wealth frees from the cage
Which penury locks, in each vice of an age
All the virtues of which, by the creed he revered,
Were to him illegitimate.
Thus, he appear'd
Neither Brutus nor Philip in action and deed,
Neither Calvin nor Savonarola in creed,
But that which the world chose to have him appear, —
The frivolous tyrant of Fashion, a mere
Reformer in coats, cards, and carriages! Still

'T was this vigour of nature, and tension of will,
Whence his love for Lucile to such passion had grown.
The moment in which with his nature her own
Into contact had come, the intense life in her,
The tenacious embrace of her strong character,
Had seized and possess'd what in him was akin
To the powers within her; and still, as within
Her loftier, larger, more luminous nature,
These powers assumed greater glory and stature,
Her influence over the mind of Eugène
Was not only strong, but so strong as to strain
All his own to a loftier limit. And so
His whole being seem'd to cling to her, as though
He divined that, in some unaccountable way,
His happier destinies secretly lay
In the light of her dark eyes. And still, in his mind,
To the anguish of losing the woman was join'd
The terror of missing his life's destination,
Of which, as in mystical representation,
The love of the woman, whose aspect benign
Guided, starlike, his soul, seem'd the symbol and sign.
For he felt, if the light of that star it should miss,
That there lurk'd in his nature, conceal'd, an abyss
Into which all the current of being might roll,
Devastating a life, and submerging a soul.

III.

And truly, the thought of it, scaring him, pass'd
O'er his heart, while he now through the twilight rode fast.
As a shade from the wing of some great bird obscene
In a wide silent land may be suddenly seen,
Darkening over the sands, where it startles and scares

Some traveller stray'd in the waste unawares,
So that thought more than once darken'd over his heart
For a moment, and rapidly seem'd to depart.
Fast and furious he rode through the thickets which rose
Up the shaggy hill-side; and the quarrelling crows
Clang'd above him, and clustering down the dim air
Dropp'd into the dark woods. By fits here and there
Shepherd fires faintly gleam'd from the valleys. O, how
He envied the wings of each wild bird, as now
He urged the steed over the dizzy ascent
Of the mountain! Behind him a murmur was sent
From the torrent — before him a sound from the tracts
Of the woodlands that waved o'er the wild cataracts,
And the loose earth and loose stones roll'd momently down
From the hoofs of his steed to abysses unknown.
The red day had fallen beneath the black woods,
And the Powers of the night through the vast solitudes
Walk'd abroad and conversed with each other. The trees
Were in sound and in motion, and mutter'd like seas
In Elfland. The road through the forest was hollow'd.
On he sped through the darkness, as though he were follow'd
Fast, fast by the Erl King!
The wild wizard-work
Of the forest at last open'd sharp, o'er the fork
Of a savage ravine, and behind the black stems

Of the tall trees, whose leaves in the light gleam'd
like gems,
Broke the broad moon above the voluminous
Rock-chaos, — the Hecate of that Tartarus!
With his horse reeking white, he at last reach'd
the door
Of a small mountain inn, on the brow of a hoar
Craggy promontory, o'er a fissure as grim,
Through which, ever roaring, there leap'd o'er the
limb
Of the rent rock a torrent of water, from sight
Into pools that were feeding the roots of the night.
A balcony hung o'er the water. Above
In a glimmering casement a shade seem'd to move.
At the door the old negress was nodding her head
As he reach'd it. 'My mistress awaits you,' she
said.
And up the rude stairway of creaking pine rafter
He follow'd her silent. A few moments after,
His heart almost chok'd him, his head seem'd to
reel,
For a door closed — and he was alone with Lucile.

IV.

In a gray travelling dress, her dark hair uncon-
fined
Streaming o'er it, and toss'd now and then by the
wind
From the lattice, that waved the dull flame in a
spire
From a brass lamp before her — a faint hectic
fire
On her cheek, to her eyes lent the lustre of fever:
They seem'd to have wept themselves wider than
ever,
Those dark eyes — so dark and so deep!
Some supreme
And concentrated effort within her to seem
Unassail'd by emotions which, nevertheless,

Were betray'd on her cheek, touch'd to strange stateliness
All her form. He sprang forward and cried,
'You relent?
'And your plans have been changed by the letter I sent?'
There his voice sank, borne down by a strong inward strife.

THE COUNTESS.

Your letter! yes, Duke. For it threatens man's life —
Woman's honour.

THE DUKE.

The last, madam, *not!*

THE COUNTESS.

Both. I glance
At your own words; blush, son of the knighthood of France,
As I read them! You say in this letter . . .
'*I know*
'*Why now you refuse me; 't is* (*is it not so?*)
'*For the man who has trifled before, wantonly,*
'*And now trifles again with the heart you deny*
To myself. But he shall not! By man's last wild law,
I will seize on the right' (the *right*, Duc de Luvois!)
'*To avenge for you, woman, the past, and to give*
'*To the future its freedom. That man shall not live*
'*To make you as wretched as you have made me!*'

THE DUKE.

Well, madam, in those words what word do you see
That threatens the honour of woman?

THE COUNTESS.

See!... what,
What word, do you ask? Every word! would you not,
Had I taken your hand thus, have felt that your name
Was soil'd and dishonour'd by more than mere shame
If the woman that bore it had first been the cause
Of the crime which in these words is menaced?
You pause!
Woman's honour, you ask? Is there, sir, no dishonour
In the smile of a woman, when men, gazing on her,
Can shudder, and say, 'In that smile is a grave'?
No! you can have no cause, Duke, for no right you have
In the contest you menace. That contest but draws
Every right into ruin. By all human laws
Of man's heart I forbid it, by all sanctities
Of man's social honour!

The Duke droop'd his eyes.
'I obey you,' he said, 'but let woman beware
'How she plays fast and loose thus with human despair
'And the storm in man's heart. Madam, yours was the right,
'When you saw that I hoped, to extinguish hope quite,
'But you should from the first have done this, for I feel
'That you knew from the first that I loved you.'
Lucile
This sudden reproach seem'd to startle.
She raised
A slow, wistful regard to his features, and gazed

On them silent awhile. His own looks were downcast.
Through her heart, whence its first wild alarm was now pass'd,
Pity crept, and perchance o'er her conscience a tear,
Falling softly, awoke it.
However severe,
Were they unjust, these sudden upbraidings, to her?
Had she lightly misconstrued this man's character,
Which had seem'd, even when most impassion'd it seem'd,
Too self-conscious to lose all in love? Had she deem'd
That this airy, gay, insolent man of the world,
So proud of the place the world gave him, held furl'd
In his bosom no passion which once shaken wide
Might tug, till it snapp'd, that erect lofty pride?
Were those elements in him, which, once roused to strife,
Overthrow a whole nature, and change a whole life?
There are two kinds of strength. One, the strength of the river,
Which through continents pushes its pathway forever
To fling its fond heart in the sea; if it lose
This, the aim of its life, it is lost to its use,
It goes mad, is diffused into deluge, and dies.
The other, the strength of the sea; which supplies
Its deep life from mysterious sources, and draws
The river's life into its own life, by laws
Which it heeds not. The difference in each case is this:
The river is lost, if the ocean it miss;
If the sea miss the river, what matter? The sea
Is the sea still, forever. Its deep heart will be

Self-sufficing, unconscious of loss as of yore;
Its sources are infinite; still to the shore,
With no diminution of pride, it will say,
'I am here; I, the sea! stand aside, and make way!'
Was his love, then, the love of the river? and she,
Had she taken that love for the love of the sea?

V.

At that thought, from her aspect whatever had been
Stern or haughty departed; and, humbled in mien,
She approach'd him, and brokenly murmur'd, as tho'
To herself, more than him, 'Was I wrong? is it so?
'Hear me, Duke! you must feel that, whatever you deem
'Your right to reproach me in this, your esteem
'I may claim on *one* ground — I at least am sincere.
'You say that to me from the first it was clear
'That you loved me. But what if this knowledge were known
'At a moment in life when I felt most alone,
'And least able to be so? a moment, in fact,
'When I strove from one haunting regret to retract
'And emancipate life, and once more to fulfil
'Woman's destinies, duties, and hopes? would you still
'So bitterly blame me, Eugène de Luvois,
'If I hoped to see all this, or deem'd that I saw
For a moment the promise of this in the plighted
'Affection of one who, in nature, united
'So much that from others affection might claim,
'If only affection were free? Do you blame
'The hope of that moment? I deem'd my heart free

'From all, saving sorrow. I deem'd that in me
'There was yet strength to mould it once more to my will,
'To uplift it once more to my hope. Do you still
'Blame me, Duke, that I did not then bid you refrain
'From hope? alas! I too then hoped!'

THE DUKE.

O again,
Yet again, say that thrice blessèd word! say, Lucile,
That you then deign'd to hope —

THE COUNTESS.

Yes! to hope I could feel,
And could give to you, that without which, all else given
Were but to deceive, and to injure you even: —
A heart free from thoughts of another. Say, then,
Do you blame that one hope?

THE DUKE.

O Lucile!

'Say again,'
She resumed, gazing down, and with faltering tone,
'Do you blame me that, when I at last had to own
'To my heart that the hope it had cherish'd was o'er,
'And forever, I said to you then, "Hope no more"?
'I myself hoped no more!'
With but ill-suppress'd wrath
The Duke answer'd . . . 'What, then! he recrosses your path,
This man, and you have but to see him, despite
'Of his troth to another, to take back that light

'Worthless heart to your own, which he wrong'd
years ago!'

Lucile faintly, brokenly murmur'd . . . 'No! no!
'T is not that — but — alas! — but I cannot conceal
'That I have not forgotten the past — but I feel
'That I cannot accept all these gifts on your part, —
'Rank — wealth — love — esteem — in return for a heart
'Which is only a ruin!'
With words warm and wild,
'Tho' a ruin it be, trust me yet to rebuild
'And restore it,' the Duke cried; 'tho' ruin'd it be,
'Since so dear is that ruin, ah, yield it to me!'
He approach'd her. She shrank back. The grief in her eyes
Answer'd 'No!'
An emotion more fierce seem'd to rise
And to break into flame, as tho' fired by the light
Of that look, in his heart. He exclaim'd, 'Am I right?
'You reject *me!* accept *him?*'
'I have not done so,'
She said firmly. He hoarsely resumed, 'Not yet — no!
'But can you with accents as firm promise me
'That you will not accept him?'
'Accept? Is he free?
'Free to offer?' she said.
'You evade me, Lucile,'
He replied; 'ah, you will not avow what you feel!
'He might make himself free? O you blush — turn away!
'Dare you openly look in my face, lady, say!
While you deign to reply to one question from me?

'I may hope not, you tell me: but tell me, may
he?
'What! silent? I alter my question. If quite
'Freed in faith from this troth, might he hope
then?'
'He might,'
She said softly.

VI.

Those two whisper'd words, in his breast,
As he heard them, in one deadly moment release
All that's evil and fierce in man's nature, to crush
And extinguish in man all that's good. In the rush
Of wild jealousy, all the fierce passions that waste
And darken and devastate intellect, chased
From its realm human reason. The wild animal
In the bosom of man was set free. And of all
Human passions the fiercest, fierce jealousy, fierce
As the fire, and more wild than the whirlwind, to
pierce
And to rend, rush'd upon him: fierce jealousy,
swell'd
By all passions bred from it, and ever impell'd
To involve all things else in the anguish within it,
And on others inflict its own pangs!
At that minute
What pass'd thro' his mind, who shall say? who
may tell
The dark thoughts of man's heart, which the red
glare of hell
Can illumine alone?
He stared wildly around
That lone place, so lonely! That silence! no
sound
Reach'd that room, thro' the dark evening air, save
the drear
Drip and roar of the cataract ceaseless and near!
It was midnight all round on the weird silent
weather;

Deep midnight in him! They two, — lone and together,
Himself, and that woman defenceless before him!
The triumph and bliss of his rival flash'd o'er him.
The abyss of his own black despair seem'd to ope
At his feet, with that awful exclusion of hope
Which Dante read over the city of doom.
All the Tarquin pass'd into his soul in the gloom,
And, uttering words he dared never recall,
Words of insult and menace, he thunder'd down all
The brew'd storm-cloud within him: its flashes scorch'd blind
His own senses. His spirit was driven on the wind
Of a reckless emotion beyond his control;
A torrent seem'd loosen'd within him. His soul
Surged up from that caldron of passion that hiss'd
And seeth'd in his heart.

VII.

He had thrown, and had miss'd
His last stake.

VIII.

For, transfigured, she rose from the place
Where he rested o'er-awed: a saint's scorn on her face:
Such a dread *vade retro* was written in light
On her forehead, the fiend would himself, at that sight,
Have sunk back abash'd to perdition. I know
If Lucretia at Tarquin but once had look'd so,
She had needed no dagger next morning.
She rose
And swept to the door, like that phantom the snows
Feel at nightfall sweep o'er them, when daylight is gone
And Caucasus is with the moon all alone.

There she paused; and, as though from immeasurable,
Insurpassable distance, she murmur'd —
'Farewell!
'We, alas! have mistaken each other. One more
'Illusion, to-night, in my lifetime is o'er.
'Duc de Luvois, adieu!'
From the heart-breaking gloom
Of that vacant, reproachful, and desolate room
He felt she was gone — gone forever!

IX.

No word,
The sharpest that ever was edged like a sword,
Could have pierced to his heart with such keen accusation
As the silence, the sudden profound isolation,
In which he remain'd.
'O return; I repent!'
He exclaim'd; but no sound through the stillness was sent,
Save the roar of the water, in answer to him,
And the beetle that, sleeping, yet humm'd her night-hymn:
An indistinct anthem, that troubled the air
With a searching, and wistful, and questioning prayer.
'Return,' sung the wandering insect. The roar
Of the waters replied, 'Nevermore! nevermore!'
He walk'd to the window. The spray on his brow
Was flung cold from the whirlpools of water below;
The frail wooden balcony shook in the sound
Of the torrent. The mountains gloom'd sullenly round.
A candle one ray from a closed casement flung.
O'er the dim balustrade all bewilder'd he hung,
Vaguely watching the broken and shimmering blink

Of the stars on the veering and vitreous brink
Of that snake-like prone column of water; and listing
Aloof o'er the languors of air the persisting
Sharp horn of the gray gnat. Before he relinquish'd
His unconscious employment, that light was extinguish'd.
Wheels, at last, from the inn door aroused him. He ran
Down the stairs; reach'd the entrance. An old stableman
Was lighting his pipe in the doorway alone.
Down the mountain, that moment, a carriage was gone.
He could hear it, already too distant to see.
He turn'd to the groom there —
'*Madame est partie.*

X.

He sprang from the door-step; he rush'd on; but whither
He knew not — on, into the dark cloudy weather —
The midnight — the mountains — on, over the shelf
Of the precipice — on, still — away from himself!
Till, exhausted, he sank 'mid the dead leaves and moss
At the mouth of the forest. A glimmering cross
Of gray stone stood for prayer by the woodside. He sank
Prayerless, powerless, down at its base, 'mid the dank
Weeds and grasses; his face hid amongst them He knew
That the night had divided his whole life in two.
Behind him a Past that was over forever;
Before him a Future devoid of endeavour
And purpose. He felt a remorse for the one,

Of the other a fear. What remain'd to be done?
Whither now should he turn? turn again, as before,
To his old, easy, careless existence of yore
He could not. He felt that for better or worse
A change had pass'd o'er him; an angry remorse
Of his own frantic failure and error had marr'd
Such a refuge forever. The future seem'd barr'd
By the corpse of a dead hope o'er which he must tread
To attain it. He realized then all the dread
Conditions which go to a life without faith.
The sole unseen fact he believed in was death.
His soul, roused to life by a great human need,
Now hunger'd and thirsted. What had he to feed
Her hunger and thirst on? That wise mother, France,
Had left to her spoil'd child of outgrown romance
Not a toy yet unbroken.
From college to college
She had gorged him crop full on her dead Tree of Knowledge;
But the lost Tree of Life — still the cherubim's sword
Fenced it from her false Edens. Belief was a word
To him, not a fact. He yet clung by a name
To a dynasty fallen forever. He came
Of an old princely house, true through change to the race
And the sword of Saint Louis — a faith 't were disgrace
To relinquish, and folly to live for! Nor less
Was his ancient religion (once potent to bless
Or to ban; and the crozier his ancestors kneel'd
To adore, when they fought for the Cross, in hard field
With the Crescent) become, ere it reach'd him, tradition;

A mere faded badge of a social position;
A thing to retain and say nothing about,
Lest, if used, it should draw degradation from doubt,
Thus, the first time he sought them, the creeds of his youth
Wholly fail'd the strong needs of his manhood, in truth!
And beyond them, what region of refuge? what field
For employment, this civilized age, did it yield,
In that civilized land? or to thought? or to action?
Blind deliriums, bewilder'd and endless distraction!
Not even a desert, not even the cell
Of a hermit to flee to, wherein he might quell
The wild devil-instincts which now, unreprest,
Ran riot thro' that ruin'd world in his breast.

XI.

So he lay there, like Lucifer, fresh from the sight
Of a heaven scaled and lost; in the wide arms of night
O'er the howling abysses of nothingness! There
As he lay, Nature's deep voice was teaching him prayer;
But what had he to pray to?
The winds in the woods,
The voices abroad o'er those vast solitudes,
Were in commune all round with the invisible Power
That walk'd the dim world by Himself at that hour.
But their language he had not yet learn'd — in despite
Of the much he *had* learn'd — or forgotten it quite,
With its once native accents. Alas! what had he
To add to that deep-toned sublime symphony

Of thanksgiving? . . . A fiery finger was still
Scorching into his heart some dread sentence. His will,
Like a wind that is put to no purpose, was wild
At its work of destruction within him. The child
Of an infidel age, he had been his own god,
His own devil.
He sat on the damp mountain sod,
And stared sullenly up at the dark sky.
The clouds
Had heap'd themselves over the bare west in crowds
Of misshapen, incongruous portents. A green
Streak of dreary, cold, luminous ether, between
The base of their black barricades, and the ridge
Of the grim world, gleam'd ghastly, as under some bridge,
Cyclop-sized, in a city of ruins o'erthrown
By sieges forgotten, some river, unknown
And unnamed, widens on into desolate lands.
While he gazed, that cloud-city invisible hands
Dismantled and rent; and reveal'd, through a loop
In the breach'd dark, the blemish'd and half-broken hoop
Of the moon, which soon silently sank; and anon
The whole supernatural pageant was gone.
The wide night, discomforted, conscious of loss,
Darken'd round him. One object alone — that gray cross —
Glimmer'd faint on the dark. Gazing up, he descried
Through the void air, its desolate arms outstretch'd wide,
As though to embrace him.
He turn'd from the sight,
Set his face to the darkness, and fled.

XII.

When the light
Of the dawn grayly flicker'd and glared on the spent
Wearied ends of the night, like a hope that is sent
To the need of some grief when its need is the sorest,
He was sullenly riding across the dark forest
Toward Serchon.
Thus riding, with eyes of defiance
Set against the young day, as disclaiming alliance
With aught that the day brings to man, he perceived,
Faintly, suddenly, fleetingly, through the damp-leaved
Autumn branches that put forth gaunt arms on his way,
The face of a man pale and wistful, and gray
With the gray glare of morning. Eugène de Luvois,
With the sense of a strange second sight, when he saw
That phantom-like face, could at once recognize,
By the sole instinct now left to guide him, the eyes
Of his rival, though fleeting the vision and dim,
With a stern, sad inquiry fixed keenly on him.
And, to meet it, a lie leap'd at once to his own;
A lie born of that lying darkness now grown
Over all in his nature! He answer'd that gaze
With a look which, if ever a man's look conveys
More intensely than words what a man means, convey'd
Beyond doubt in its smile an announcement which said,
'*I have triumph'd. The question your eyes would imply*
'*Comes too late, Alfred Vargrave!*'
And so he rode by,

And rode on, and rode gayly, and rode out of sight,
Leaving that look behind him to rankle and bite.

XIII.

And it bit, and it rankled.

XIV.

Lord Alfred, scarce knowing,
Or choosing, or heeding the way he was going,
By one wild hope impell'd, by one wild fear pursued,
And led by one instinct, which seem'd to exclude
From his mind every human sensation, save one —
The torture of doubt — had stray'd moodily on,
Down the highway deserted, that evening in which
With the Duke he had parted; stray'd on, thro' the rich
Haze of sunset, on into the gradual night,
Which darken'd, unnoticed, the land from his sight,
Toward Saint Saviour; nor did the changed aspect of all
The wild scenery round him avail to recall
To his senses their normal perceptions, until,
As he stood on the black shaggy brow of the hill
At the mouth of the forest, the moon, which had hung
Two dark hours in a cloud, slipp'd on fire from among
The rent vapours, and sunk o'er the ridge of the world.
Then he lifted his eyes, and saw round him unfurl'd,
In one moment of splendour, the leagues of dark trees,
And the long, rocky line of the wild Pyrenees.
And he knew by the milestone scored rough on the face
Of the bare rock, he was but two hours from the place

Where Lucile and Luvois must have met. This same track
The Duke must have travers'd, perforce, to get back
To Serchon; not yet then the Duke had return'd!
He listen'd, he look'd up the dark, but discern'd
Not a trace, not a sound of a horse by the way.
He knew that the night was approaching to day.
He resolved to proceed to Saint Saviour. The morn
Which, at last, through the forest broke chill and forlorn,
Reveal'd to him, riding toward Serchon, the Duke.
'T was then that the two men exchanged look for look.

XV.

And the Duke's rankled in him.

XVI.

He rush'd on. He tore
His path through the thicket. He reach'd the inn-door,
Roused the yet drowsing porter, reluctant to rise,
And inquired for the Countess. The man rubb'd his eyes.
The Countess was gone. And the Duke?
The man stared
A sleepy inquiry.
With accents that scared
The man's dull sense awake, 'He, the stranger,' he cried,
'Who had been there that night!'
The man grinn'd, and replied,
With a vacant intelligence, 'He, oh ay, ay!
'He went after the lady.'
No further reply
Could he give. Alfred Vargrave demanded no more,
Flung a coin to the man, and so turn'd from the door.

'What! the Duke then the night in that lone inn had pass'd?
'In that lone inn — with her!' Was that look he had cast
When they met in the forest, that look which remain'd
On his mind with its terrible smile, thus explain'd?

XVII.

The day was half turn'd to the evening, before
He re-enter'd Serchon, with a heart sick and sore.
In the midst of a light crowd of babblers, his look,
By their voices attracted, distinguish'd the Duke,
Gay, insolent, noisy, with eyes sparkling bright,
With laughter, shrill, airy, continuous.
Right
Through the throng Alfred Vargrave, with swift sombre stride,
Glided on. The Duke noticed him, turn'd, stepp'd aside,
And, cordially grasping his hand, whisper'd low,
'Oh, how right have you been! There can never be — no,
'Never — any more contest between us! Milord,
'Let us henceforth be friends!'
Having utter'd that word,
He turn'd lightly round on his heel, and again
His gay laughter was heard, echoed loud by that train
Of his young imitators.
Lord Alfred stood still,
Rooted, stunn'd, to the spot. He felt weary and ill.
Out of heart with his own heart, and sick to the soul
With a dull stifling anguish he could not control.
Does he hear in a dream, through the buzz of the crowd,
The Duke's blithe associates, babbling aloud
Some comment upon his gay humour that day?

He never was gayer: what makes him so gay?
'T is, no doubt, say the flatterers, flattering in tune,
Some vestal whose virtue no tongue dare impugn
Has at last found a Mars — who, of course, shall
be nameless.
The vestal that yields to Mars *only* is blameless!
Hark! hears he a name which, thus syllabled, stirs
All his heart into tumult? . . . Lucile de Nevers
With the Duke's coupled gayly, in some laughing,
light,
Free allusion? Not so as might give him the right
To turn fiercely round on the speaker, but yet
To a trite and irreverent compliment set!

XVIII.

Slowly, slowly, usurping that place in his soul
Where the thought of Lucile was enshrined, did
there roll
Back again, back again, on its smooth downward
course
O'er his nature, with gather'd momentum and force,
THE WORLD.

XIX.

'No!' he mutter'd, 'she cannot have sinn'd!
'True! women there are (self-named women of
mind!)
'Who love rather liberty — liberty, yes!
'To choose and to leave — than the legalized stress
'Of the most brilliant marriage. But she — is she so?
'I will not believe it. Lucile? Oh no, no!
'Not Lucile!
'But the world? and, ah, what would it say?
'O the look of that man, and his laughter, to-day!
'The gossip's light question! the slanderous jest!
'She is right! no, we could not be happy. 'T is best
'As it is. I will write to her — write, O my heart!
'And accept her farewell. *Our* farewell must we
part —

'Part thus, then — forever, Lucile? Is it so?
'Yes! I feel it. We could not be happy, I know.
''T was a dream! we must waken!'

XX.

With head bow'd, as though
By the weight of the heart's resignation, and slow
Moody footsteps, he turn'd to his inn.
Drawn apart
From the gate, in the courtyard, and ready to start,
Postboys mounted, portmanteaus pack'd up and made fast,
A travelling-carriage, unnoticed, he pass'd.
He order'd his horse to be ready anon;
Sent, and paid, for the reckoning, and slowly pass'd on,
And ascended the staircase, and enter'd his room.
It was twilight. The chamber was dark in the gloom
Of the evening. He listlessly kindled a light,
On the mantel-piece; there a large card caught his sight —
A large card, a stout card, well printed and plain,
Nothing flourishing, flimsy, affected, or vain.
It gave a respectable look to the slab
That it lay on. The name was —

SIR RIDLEY MACNAB.

Full familiar to him was the name that he saw,
For 't was that of his own future uncle-in-law,
Mrs. Darcy's rich brother, the banker, well known
As wearing the longest-phylacteried gown
Of all the rich Pharisees England can boast of;

A shrewd Puritan Scot, whose sharp wits made the most of
This world and the next; having largely invested
Not only where treasure is never molested
By thieves, moth, or rust; but on this earthly ball,
Where interest was high, and security small.
Of mankind there was never a theory yet
Not by some individual instance upset:
From old Homer's, who sang that the race may be found
Now flourishing high, and now low on the ground,
Like the leaves upon trees; for one sometimes perceives
Certain creatures that spring from the mud put forth leaves
In high places; and so to that verse in the Psalm
Which declares that the wicked expand like the palm
In a world where the righteous are stunted and pent,
A cheering exception did Ridley present.
Like the worthy of Uz, Heaven prosper'd his piety.
The leader of every religious society,
Christian knowledge he labour'd thro' life to promote
With personal profit, and knew how to quote
Both the stocks and the Scripture, with equal advantage
To himself and admiring friends, in this Cant-Age.

XXI.

Whilst over this card Alfred vacantly brooded,
A waiter his head thro' the doorway protruded;
'Sir Ridley MacNab with Milord wish'd to speak.'
Alfred Vargrave could feel there were tears on his cheek;
He brush'd them away with a gesture of pride.

He glanced at the glass; when his own face he eyed,
He was scared by its pallor. Inclining his head,
He with tones calm, unshaken, and silvery, said
'Sir Ridley may enter.'
In three minutes more
That benign apparition appear'd at the door.
Sir Ridley, releas'd for a while from the cares
Of business, and minded to breathe the pure airs
Of the blue Pyrenees, and enjoy his release,
In company there with his sister and niece,
Found himself now at Serchon — distributing tracts,
Sowing seed by the way, and collecting new facts
For Exeter Hall; he was starting that night
For Bigorre: he had heard, to his cordial delight,
That Lord Alfred was there, and, himself, setting out
For the same destination: impatient, no doubt!
Here some commonplace compliments as to 'the marriage'
Through his speech trickled softly, like honey: his carriage
Was ready. A storm seem'd to threaten the weather:
If his young friend agreed, why not travel together?

With a footstep uncertain and restless, a frown
Of perplexity, during this speech, up and down
Alfred Vargrave was striding; but, after a pause
And a slight hesitation, the which seem'd to cause
Some surprise to Sir Ridley, he answer'd — 'My dear
'Sir Ridley, allow me a few moments here —
'Half an hour at the most — to conclude an affair
'Of a nature so urgent as hardly to spare
'My presence (which brought me, indeed, to this spot),
'Before I accept your kind offer.'

'Why not?'
Said Sir Ridley, and smiled. Alfred Vargrave, before
Sir Ridley observed it, had pass'd through the door.
A few moments later, with footsteps revealing
Intense agitation of uncontroll'd feeling,
He was rapidly pacing the garden below.
What pass'd through his mind then is more than I know.
But before one half-hour into darkness had fled,
In the courtyard he stood with Sir Ridley. His tread
Was firm and composed. Not a sign on his face
Betray'd there the least agitation. 'The place
'You so kindly have offer'd,' he said, 'I accept.'
And he stretch'd out his hand. The two travellers stepp'd
Smiling into the carriage.
And thus, out of sight,
They drove down the dark road, and into the night.
Who can answer where any road leads to?

XXII.

Alas!
There are so many questions of this kind that pass
My perplex'd comprehension, that were I to place them
On record, no volume would ever encase them.
There is heaven above us! we see it each day:
But what is the reason, can any one say,
Why what we see most of, we least comprehend?
Again, if our eyes on earth only we bend,
What suggests that strange doubt—'This appealing Creation,
'Which says . . . Eat, drink, be full! . . . is it only temptation?'

Tho' divine Aphrodite should open her arms
To our longing, and lull us to sleep on her charms;
Tho' the world its full sum of enjoyment insure us
Tho' Horace, Lucretius, and old Epicurus
Sit beside us, and swear we are happy, what then?
Whence the answer within us which cries to these men,
'Let it be! you say well; but the world is too old
'To rekindle within it the ages of gold;
'A vast hope hath travers'd the earth, and our eyes
'In despite of ourselves we must lift to the skies'?
And we lift them; and, lifting them, why do we find
That just when we vindicate sight, we are blind?
The Sir Ridleys, and other good men of that class,
Bring spectacles, which not a raylet will pass;
And seek to make clear to our vision the sun,
By dimming his splendour, and smoking him dun.
Then we turn to the children of this generation,
Since the children of light deal in light's obscuration.
And O Chaos and Night! what at last do we mark
By the gleam of their corpse-lights enkindling the dark?
A Leibnitz transfigures clean from us our being:
From whirlpool to whirlpool Descartes sets it fleeing:
With that horrible face, Monsieur Arouet Voltaire
Grins Theology out of its wits at one stare.
Not the first time a dwarf's sword a giant despatch'd;
If it could not cut deep, it disfigured and scratch'd.
Next, man in the image of Jean Jacques we have,
A coward, a liar, a thief, and a slave!
Spinosa finds out for us God everywhere,
Saving just where we, else, could have found Him, in prayer;

Locke (and few will dispute the assertion I ween)
Is a great mechanician if man 's a machine:
Kant, the great god of Nothing, takes pains to ex
pound,
But his pains go for nothing — since nothing is
found.
And of all human science the last word is this;
Simply Nothing — the name scribbled o'er an
abyss.
Is, then, Life one vast question without a reply?
Must man, like Ulysses, with stopp'd ears sail by
Where'er Thought and Sense (Sirens only) sing
to him
Songs over the deeps, that are sure to undo him
If once he should list to the music that mocks
The frail bark it lures to the whirlpools and rocks?
And to exercise thought, or to satisfy sense,
To the Being that gave both, is this an offence?
Not mine be that creed, whosesoever it be!
My heart humbly whispers this answer to me:
— True! the more we gaze up into heaven, the
more
Do we feel our gaze foil'd; all attempt to explore
With earth's finite insight heaven's infinite glad-
ness
Is baffled by something like infinite sadness.
What then, did man's limited science engirth
Heaven's limitless secret, were man's use on earth,
Where he just sees enough of the heaven above
him
To be sure it is there, to confirm and approve
him
In his work upon earth, whence he works his way
to it?
True! the more that we seek earthly bliss, and
pursue it,
The more do we feel it inadequate, wholly
Insufficient for man; a profound melancholy
At the bottom of all, like the whirlpool, absorbs,

In its own sombre bosom, the brittle bright orbs
Of those painted bubbles call'd pleasures. What then,
If earth in itself were sufficient for men,
Would be man's claim to that glorious promise which arches
With Hope's fourfold bow the black path where he marches
Triumphant to death, chanting boldly, 'Beyond!'
Whilst invisible witnesses round him respond
From the Infinite, till the great Pæan is caught
By the echoes of heaven, and the chariot of Thought
Roll's forth from the world's ringing walls to its goal,
Urged by Faith, the bright-eyed charioteer of the soul?

XXIII.

Sir Ridley was one of those wise men who, so far
As their power of saying it goes, say with Zophar,
'We, no doubt, are the people, and wisdom shall die with us!'
Though of wisdom like theirs there is no small supply with us.
Side by side in the carriage ensconced, the two men
Began to converse, somewhat drowsily, when
Alfred suddenly thought — 'Here 's a man of ripe age,
'At my side, by his fellows reputed as sage,
'Who looks happy, and therefore who must have been wise:
'Suppose I with caution reveal to his eyes
'Some few of the reasons which make me believe
'That I neither am happy nor wise? 't would relieve
'And enlighten, perchance, my own darkness and doubt.'
For which purpose a feeler he softly put out.

It was snapp'd up at once.
'What is truth?' jesting Pilate
Ask'd, and pass'd from the question at once with a smile at
Its utter futility. Had he address'd it
To Ridley McNab, he at least had confess'd it
Admitted discussion! and certainly no man
Could more promptly have answer'd the sceptical Roman
Than Ridley. Hear some street astronomer talk!
Grant him two or three hearers, a morsel of chalk,
And forthwith on the pavement he'll sketch you the scheme
Of the heavens. Then hear him enlarge on his theme!
Not afraid of Laplace, nor of Arago, he!
He'll prove you the whole plan in plain A B C.
Here's your sun — call him A; B 's the moon; it is clear
How the rest of the alphabet brings up the rear
Of the planets. Now ask Arago, ask Laplace,
(Your sages, who speak with the heavens face to face!)
Their science in plain A B C to accord
To your point-blank inquiry, my friends! not a word
Will you get for your pains from their sad lips. Alas!
Not a drop from the bottle that's quite full will pass.
'T is the half-empty vessel that freest emits
The water that's in it. 'T is thus with men's wits;
Or at least with their knowledge. A man's capability
Of imparting to others a truth with facility
Is proportion'd forever with painful exactness
To the portable nature, the vulgar compactness,
The minuteness in size, or the lightness in weight
Of the truth he imparts. So small coins circulate

More freely than large ones. A beggar asks alms,
And we fling him a sixpence, nor feel any qualms;
But if every street charity shook an investment,
Or each beggar to clothe we must strip off a vestment,
The length of the process would limit the act;
And therefore the truth that 's summ'd up in a tract
Is most lightly dispensed.
As for Alfred, indeed,
On what spoonfuls of truth he was suffer'd to feed
By Sir Ridley, I know not. This only I know,
That the two men thus talking continued to go
Onward somehow, together — on into the night —
The midnight — in which they escape from our sight.

XXIV.

And meanwhile a world had been changed in its place,
And those glittering chains that o'er blue, balmy space
Hang the blessing of darkness, had drawn out of sight,
To solace unseen hemispheres, the soft night;
And the dew of the dayspring benignly descended,
And the fair morn to all things new sanction extended,
In the smile of the East. And the lark soaring on,
Lost in light, shook the dawn with a song from the sun.
And the world laugh'd.
It wanted but two rosy hours
From the noon, when they pass'd through the tall passion-flowers
Of the little wild garden that dimpled before
The small house where their carriage now stopp'd at Bigorre.

And more fair than the flowers, more fresh than the dew,
With her white morning robe flitting joyously through
The dark shrubs with which the soft hill-side was clothed,
Alfred Vargrave perceived, where he paused, his betrothed.
Matilda sprang to him, at once, with a face
Of such sunny sweetness, such gladness, such grace,
And radiant confidence, childlike delight,
That his whole heart upbraided itself at that sight.
And he murmur'd, or sigh'd, 'O, how could I have stray'd
'From this sweet child, or suffer'd in aught to invade
'Her young claim on my life, though it were for an hour,
'The thought of another?'
'Look up, my sweet flower!'
He whisper'd her softly, 'my heart unto thee
'Is return'd, as returns to the rose the wild bee!'
'And will wander no more?' laugh'd Matilda.
'No more,'
He repeated. And, low to himself, 'Yes, 't is o'er!
'My course, too, is decided, Lucile! Was I blind
'To have dream'd that these clever Frenchwomen of mind
'Could satisfy simply a plain English heart,
'Or sympathize with it?'

XXV.

And here the first part
Of this drama is over. The curtain falls furl'd
On the actors within it — the Heart and the World.
Woo'd and wooer have play'd with the riddle of life, —

Have they solved it?
Appear! answer, Husband and Wife

XXVI.

Yet, ere bidding farewell to Lucile de Nevers,
Hear her own heart's farewell in this letter of hers.

THE COMTESSE DE NEVERS TO A FRIEND IN INDIA.

'ONCE more, O my friend, to your arms and your heart,
'And the places of old . . . never, never to part!
'Once more to the palm and the fountain! Once more
'To the land of my birth and the deep skies of yore!
'From the cities of Europe, pursued by the fret
'Of their turmoil wherever my footsteps are set;
'From the children that cry for the birth, and behold,
'There is no strength to bear them — old Time is *so* old!
'From the world's weary masters, that come upon earth
'Sapp'd and min'd by the fever they bear from their birth;
'From the men of small stature, mere parts of a crowd,
'Born too late, when the strength of the world hath been bow'd;
'Back, — back to the orient, from whose sunbright womb
'Sprang the giants which now are no more, in the bloom
'And the beauty of times that are faded forever!
'To the palms! to the tombs! to the still Sacred River!

Where I too, the child of a day that is done,
'First leapt into life, and look'd up at the sun.
'Back again, back again, to the hill-tops of home
'I come, O my friend, my consoler, I come!
'Are the three intense stars that we watch'd night by night
'Burning broad on the band of Orion as bright?
'Are the large Indian moons as serene as of old,
'When, as children, we gather'd the moonbeams for gold?
'Do you yet recollect me, my friend? Do you still
'Remember the free games we play'd on the hill,
''Mid those huge stones upheap'd, where we recklessly trod
'O'er the old ruin'd fane of the old ruin'd god?
'How he frown'd, while around him we carelessly play'd!
'That frown on my life ever after hath stay'd,
'Like the shade of a solemn experience upcast
'From some vague supernatural grief in the past.
'For the poor god, in pain, more than anger, he frown'd,
'To perceive that our youth, though so fleeting, had found,
'In its transient and ignorant gladness, the bliss
'Which his science divine seem'd divinely to miss.
'Alas! you may haply remember me yet
'The free child, whose glad childhood myself I forget.
'I come — a sad woman, defrauded of rest:
I bear to you only a labouring breast:
'My heart is a storm-beaten ark, wildly hurl'd
'O'er the whirlpools of time, with the wrecks of a world:
'The dove from my bosom hath flown far away:
'It is flown, and returns not, though many a day
'Have I watch'd from the windows of life for its coming.

'Friend, I sigh for repose, I am weary of roaming.
'I know not what Ararat rises for me
'Far away, o'er the waves of the wandering sea:
'I know not what rainbow may yet, from far hills,
'Lift the promise of hope, the cessation of ills:
'But a voice, like the voice of my youth, in my breast
'Wakes and whispers me on — to the East! to the East!
'Shall I find the child's heart that I left there? or find
'The lost youth I recall with its pure peace of mind?
'Alas! who shall number the drops of the rain?
'Or give to the dead leaves their greenness again?
'Who shall seal up the caverns the earthquake hath rent?
'Who shall bring forth the winds that within them are pent?
'To a voice who shall render an image? or who
'From the heats of the noontide shall gather the dew?
'I have burn'd out within me the fuel of life.
'Wherefore lingers the flame? Rest is sweet after strife.
'I would sleep for a while. I am weary.
'My friend,
'I had meant in these lines to regather, and send
'To our old home, my life's scatter'd links. But 't is vain!
'My own touch seems to shatter the chaplet again;
'Only fit now for fingers like mine to run o'er,
'Who return, a recluse, to those cloisters of yore
'Whence too far have I wander'd.
'How many long years
'Does it seem to me now since the quick, scorching tears,
'While I wrote to you, splash'd out a girl's premature

'Moans of pain at what women in silence endure!
'To your eyes, friend of mine, and to your eyes alone,
'That now long-faded page of my life hath been shown
'Which recorded my heart's birth, and death, as you know
'Many years since, — how many!
'A few months ago
'I seem'd reading it backward, that page! Why explain
'Whence or how? The old dream of my life rose again
'The old superstition! the idol of old!
'It is over. The leaf trodden down in the mould
Is not to the forest more lost than to me
'That emotion. I bury it here by the sea
'Which will bear me anon far away from the shore
'Of a land which my footsteps will visit no more,
'And a heart's *requiescat* I write on that grave.
'Hark! the sigh of the wind, and the sound of the wave,
'Seem like voices of spirits that whisper me home!
'I come, O you whispering voices, I come!
'My friend, ask me nothing.
'Receive me alone
'As a Santon receives to his dwelling of stone
'In silence some pilgrim the midnight may bring:
'It may be an angel that, weary of wing,
'Hath paused in his flight from some city of doom,
'Or only a wayfarer stray'd in the gloom.
'This only I know: that in Europe at least
'Lives the craft or the power that must master our East.
'Wherefore strive where the gods must themselves yield at last?
'Both they and their altars pass by with the Past.
'The gods of the household Time thrusts from the shelf;

'And I seem as unreal and weird to myself
'As those idols of old.
'Other times, other men,
'Other men, other passions!
'So be it! yet again
'I turn to my birthplace, the birthplace of morn,
'And the light of those lands where the great sun
is born!
'Spread your arms, O my friend! on your breast
let me feel
'The repose which hath fled from my own.
'Your LUCILE.'

PART II.

CANTO I.

I.

HARP of mine, to my breast let me clasp thee once more
As closely, old friend, as I clasp'd thee of yore,
When the world smiled on me thro' thy three chords of gold,
Hope, Wonder, and Love breathing music! Behold!
Now, celestially naked, — new Queen of the world, —
Where the rose, her red signal, is gayly unfurl'd,
Summer stands in the meadows and dresses her bowers,
Shyly tended upon by the virgin-eyed flowers;
And her rich voice hath reach'd me, far-floating along —
'All my lovers sing round me, but where is thy song?'
In secret the nightingale sings from the dark
Of his thicket, in sunlight is singing the lark,
And that spirit which men call the cuckoo sends out
Of the blue heart of heaven a jubilant shout,
And the brown thrush is loud in the milk-white May-bush,
And the bee makes a melody heard through the lush

Yellow-neck'd honeysuckles, and out of its dream
The air hums and whispers.
I turn to the theme
Long neglected.
Years, too, have pass'd over the head
Of my hero since last of his fortunes you read,
Gentle Reader. By way, then, of due preparation,
I feel that my song needs a new invocation.
Hard to find! For each Muse by this time has, I know,
Been used up, and Apollo has bent his own bow
All too long; so I leave unassaulted the portal
Of Olympus, and only invoke here a mortal.

Hail, Murray! — not Lindley, — but Murray and Son.
Hail, omniscient, beneficent, great Two-in-One!
In Albemarle Street may thy temple long stand!
Long enlighten'd and led by thine erudite hand,
May each novice in science nomadic unravel
The *celarent*, *darii*, *ferio* of travel!
May each inn-keeping knave long thy judgments revere,
And the postboys of Europe regard thee with fear;
While they feel, in the silence of baffled extortion,
That knowledge is power! Long, long, like that portion
Of the national soil which the Greek exile took
In his baggage wherever he went, may thy book
Cheer each poor British pilgrim, who trusts to thy wit
Not to pay through his nose just for following it!
May'st thou long, O instructor! preside o'er his way,
And teach him alike what to praise and to pay!
Thee, pursuing this pathway of song, once again
I invoke, lest, unskill'd, I should wander in vain.

To my call be propitious, nor, churlish, refuse
Thy great accents to lend to the lips of my Muse;
For I sing of the Naiads who dwell 'mid the stems
Of the green linden-trees by the waters of Ems.
Yes! thy spirit descends upon mine, O John Murray!
And I start — with thy book — for the Baths in a hurry.

II.

'At Coblentz a bridge of boats crosses the Rhine;
'And from thence the road, winding by Ehrenbreitstein,
'Passes over the frontier of Nassau.
('N. B.
'No Custom-house here since the Zollverein.' See Murray, paragraph 30.)
'The route, at each turn,
Here the lover of nature allows to discern,
In varying prospect, a rich wooded dale:
The vine and acacia-tree mostly prevail
'In the foliage observable here; and, moreover,
'The soil is carbonic. The road, under cover
'Of the grape-clad and mountainous upland that hems
'Round this beautiful spot, brings the traveller to —
'EMS.
'A Schnellpost from Frankfort arrives every day.
'At the Kurhaus (the old Ducal mansion) you pay
'Eight florins for lodgings. A Restaurateur
'Is attach'd to the place; but most travellers prefer
'(Including, indeed, many persons of note)
'To dine at the usual-priced table d'hôte.
'Through the town runs the Lahn, the steep green banks of which
'Two rows of white picturesque houses enrich;
'And between the high-road and the river is laid
'Out a sort of a garden, call'd "THE Promenade"

'Female visitors here, who may make up their mind
'To ascend to the top of these mountains, will find
'On the banks of the stream, saddled all the day long,
'Troops of donkeys — sure-footed — proverbially strong';
And the traveller at Ems may remark, as he passes,
Here, as elsewhere, the women run after the asses.

III.

'Mid the world's weary denizens bound for these springs
In the month when the merle on the maple-bough sings,
Pursued to the place from dissimilar paths
By a similar sickness, there came to the baths
Four sufferers — each stricken deep through the heart
Or the head by the selfsame invisible dart
Of the arrow that flieth unheard in the noon,
From the sickness that walketh unseen in the moon,
Through this great lazaretto of life, wherein each
Infects with his own sores the next within reach.
First of these were a young English husband and wife,
Grown weary ere half thro' the journey of life.
O Nature, say where, thou gray mother of earth,
Is the strength of thy youth? that thy womb brings to birth
Only old men to-day! On the winds, as of old,
Thy voice in its accent is joyous and bold;
Thy forests are green as of yore; and thine oceans
Yet move in the might of their ancient emotions:
But man — thy last birth and thy best — is no more
Life's free lord, that look'd up to the starlight of yore,

With the faith on the brow, and the fire in the eyes,
The firm foot on the earth, the high heart in the skies;
But a gray-headed infant, defrauded of youth,
Born too late or too early.
The lady, in truth,
Was young, fair, and gentle; and never was given
To more heavenly eyes the pure azure of heaven.
Never yet did the sun touch to ripples of gold
Tresses brighter than those which her soft hand unroll'd
From her noble and innocent brow, when she rose
An Aurora at dawn from her balmy repose,
And into the mirror the bloom and the blush
Of her beauty broke, glowing; like light in a gush
From the sunrise in summer.
Love, roaming, shall meet
But rarely a nature more sound or more sweet —
Eyes brighter — brows whiter — a figure more fair —
Or lovelier lengths of more radiant hair —
Than thine, Lady Alfred! And here I aver
(May those that have seen thee declare if I err!)
That not all the oysters in Britain contain
A pearl pure as thou art.
Let some one explain, —
Who may know more than I of the intimate life
Of the pearl with the oyster, — why yet in his wife,
In despite of her beauty — and most when he felt
His soul to the sense of her loveliness melt —
Lord Alfred miss'd something he sought for: indeed,
The more that he miss'd it, the greater the need;
Till it seem'd to himself he could willingly spare
All the charms that he found for the one charm not there.

IV.

For the blessings Life lends us, it strictly demands
The worth of their full usufruct at our hands
And the value of all things exists, not indeed
In themselves, but man's use of them, feeding man's need.
Alfred Vargrave, in wedding with Beauty and Youth,
Had embraced both Ambition and Wealth. Yet in truth
Unfulfill'd the ambition, and sterile the wealth
(In a life paralyzed by a moral ill-health),
Had remain'd, while the beauty and youth, unredeem'd
From a vague disappointment at all things, but seem'd
Day by day to reproach him in silence for all
That lost youth in himself they had fail'd to recall.
No career had he follow'd, no object obtain'd
In the world by those worldly advantages gain'd
From nuptials beyond which once seem'd to appear,
Lit by love, the broad path of a brilliant career.
All that glitter'd and gleam'd through the moonlight of youth
With a glory so fair, now that manhood in truth
Grasp'd and gather'd it, seem'd like that false fairy gold
Which leaves in the hand only moss, leaves, and mould!

V.

Fairy gold! moss and leaves! and the young Fairy Bride?
Lived there yet fairylands in the face at his side?
Say, O friend, if at evening thou ever hast watch'd
Some pale and impalpable vapour, detach'd

From the dim and disconsolate earth, rise and fall
O'er the light of a sweet, serene star, until all
The chill'd splendour reluctantly waned in the deep
Of its own native heaven? So, slowly did creep
O'er that fair and ethereal face, day by day,
While the radiant vermeil, subsiding away,
Hid its light in the heart, the faint gradual veil
Of a sadness unconscious.
The lady grew pale
As silent her lord grew: and both, as they ey'd
Each the other askance, turn'd, and secretly sigh'd.
Ah, wise friend, what avails all experience can give?
True, we know what life is — but, alas! do we live?
The grammar of life we have gotten by heart
But life's self we have made a dead language — an art,
Not a voice. Could we speak it, but once, as 't was spoken
When the silence of passion the first time was broken!
Cuvier knew the world better than Adam, no doubt:
But the last man, at best, was but learnèd about
What the first, without learning, *enjoy'd*. What art thou
To the man of to-day, O Leviathan, now?
A science. What wert thou to him that from ocean
First beheld thee appear? A surprise, — an emotion!
When life leaps in the veins, when it beats in the heart,
When it thrills as it fills every animate part,
Where lurks it? how works it? . . we scarcely detect it.

But life goes: the heart dies: haste, O leech, and
dissect it!
This accursèd æsthetical, ethical age
Hath so finger'd life's horn-book, so blurr'd every
page,
That the old glad romance, the gay chivalrous
story
With its fables of faery, its legends of glory,
Is turn'd to a tedious instruction, not new
To the children that read it insipidly through.
We know too much of Love ere we love. We can
trace
Nothing new, unexpected, or strange in his face
When we see it at last. 'T is the same little Cupid,
With the same dimpled cheek, and the smile
almost stupid,
We have seen in our pictures, and stuck on our
shelves,
And copied a hundred times over, ourselves.
And wherever we turn, and whatever we do,
Still, that horrible sense of the *déjà connu!*

VI.

Perchance 't was the fault of the life that they led;
Perchance 't was the fault of the novels they r[illegible]
Perchance 't was a fault in themselves; I am bo[illegible]
not
To say: this I know — that these two creatu[illegible]
found not
In each other some sign they expected to find
Of a something unnamed in the heart or the min[illegible];
And, missing it, each felt a right to complain
Of a sadness which each found no word to explai[illegible]
Whatever it was, the world noticed not it
In the light-hearted beauty, the light-hearted wit.
Still, as once with the actors in Greece, 't is the
case,
Each must speak to the crowd with a mask on his
face.

Praise follow'd Matilda wherever she went.
She was flatter'd. Can flattery purchase content?
Yes. While yet to its voice, for a moment, she listen'd,
The young cheek still bloom'd, and the soft eye still glisten'd;
And her lord, when, like one of those light vivid things
That glide down the gauzes of summer with wings
Of rapturous radiance, unconscious she moved
Thro' that buzz of inferior creatures which proved
Her beauty, their envy, one moment forgot
'Mid the many charms there, the one charm that was not:
And when o'er her beauty enraptured he bow'd,
(As they turn'd to each other, each flush'd from the crowd,)
And murmur'd those praises which yet seem'd more dear
Than the praises of others had grown to her ear,
She, too, ceased for a while her own fate to regret:
'Yes! . . he loves me,' she sigh'd; 'this is love, then — and *yet* — *!*'

VII.

Ah, that *yet!* fatal word! 't is the moral of all
Thought and felt, seen or done, in this world since the Fall!
It stands at the end of each sentence we learn;
It flits in the vista of all we discern;
It leads us, for ever and ever, away
To find in to-morrow what flies with to-day.
'T was this same little fatal and mystical word
That now, like a mirage, led my lady and lord
To the waters of Ems from the waters of Marah;
Drooping pilgrims in Fashion's blank, arid Sahara!

VIII.

At the same time, pursued by a spell much the same,
To these waters two other worn pilgrims there came:
One a man, one a woman: just now, at the latter,
As the Reader I mean by and by to look at her
And judge for himself, I will not even glance.

IX.

Of the self-crown'd young kings of the Fashion in France,
Whose resplendent regalia so dazzled the sight,
Whose horse was so perfect, whose boots were so bright,
Who so hail'd in the salon, so mark'd in the Bois,
Who so welcomed by all, as Eugène de Luvois?
Of all the smooth-brow'd premature debauchees
In that town of all towns, where Debauchery sees
On the forehead of youth her mark everywhere graven,—
In Paris, I mean,—where the streets are all paven
By those two fiends whom Milton saw bridging the way
From Hell to this planet,—who, haughty and gay,
The free rebel of life, bound or led by no law,
Walk'd that causeway as bold as Eugène de Luvois?
Yes! he march'd through the great masquerade, loud of tongue,
Bold of brow: but the motley he mask'd in, it hung
So loose, trail'd so wide, and appear'd to impede
So strangely at times the vex'd effort at speed,
That a keen eye might guess it was made—not for him,
But some brawler more stalwart of stature and limb.

That it irk'd him, in truth, you at times could
divine,
For when low was the music, and spilt was the
wine,
He would clutch at the garment, as though it op-
press'd
And stifled some impulse that choked in his breast.

X.

What! he, . . . the light sport of his frivolous ease!
Was he, too, a prey to a mortal disease?
My friend, hear a parable: ponder it well:
For a moral there is in the tale that I tell.
One evening I sat in the Palais Royal,
And there, while I laugh'd at Grassot and Arnal,
My eye fell on the face of a man at my side;
Every time that he laugh'd I observed that he
sigh'd,
As though vex'd to be pleased. I remark'd that
he sat
Ill at ease on his seat, and kept twirling his hat
In his hand, with a look of unquiet abstraction.
I inquired the cause of his dissatisfaction.
'Sir,' he said, 'if what vexes me here you would
know,
'Learn that, passing this way some few half-hours
ago,
'I walk'd into the Français, to look at Rachel.
'(Sir, that woman in Phèdre is a miracle!)—Well,
'I ask'd for a box: they were occupied all:
'For a seat in the balcon: all taken! a stall:
'Taken too: the whole house was as full as could
be,—
'Not a hole for a rat! I had just time to see
'The lady I love *tête-à-tête* with a friend
'In a box out of reach at the opposite end:
'Then the crowd push'd me out. What was left
me to do?
'I tried for the tragedy . . . *que voulez vous?*

'Every place for the tragedy book'd! . . . *mon ami*,
'The farce was close by: . . . at the farce *me voici!*
'The piece is a new one: and Grassot plays well:
'There is drollery, too, in that fellow Ravel:
'Arnal's nose is surprising indeed! . . . yet I meant
'My evening elsewhere, and not thus, to have spent.
'Fate orders these things by her will, not by ours!
'Sir, mankind is the sport of invisible powers.'

I once met the Duc de Luvois for a moment;
And I mark'd, when his features I fix'd in my comment,
O'er those features the same vague disquietude stray
I had seen on the face of my friend at the play;
And I thought that he too, very probably, spent
His evenings not wholly as first he had meant.

XI.

O source of the holiest joys we inherit,
O Sorrow, thou solemn, invisible spirit!
Ill fares it with man when, through life's desert sand,
Grown impatient too soon for the long-promised land,
He turns from the worship of thee, as thou art,
An expressless and imageless truth in the heart,
And takes of the jewels of Egypt, the pelf
And the gold of the Godless, to make to himself
A gaudy, idolatrous image of thee,
And then bows to the sound of the cymbal the knee.
The sorrows we make to ourselves are false gods:
Like the prophets of Baal, our bosoms with rods
We may smite, we may gash at our hearts till they bleed,
But these idols are blind, deaf, and dumb to our need.

The land is athirst, and cries out! . . . 't is in vain;
The great blessing of heaven descends not in rain.

XII.

It was night; and the lamps were beginning to gleam
Through the long linden-trees, folded each in his dream,
From that building which looks like a temple . . . and is
The Temple of — Health? Nay, but enter! I wis
That never the rosy-hued deity knew
One votary out of that sallow-cheek'd crew
Of Courlanders, Wallacs, Greeks, affable Russians,
Explosive Parisians, potato-faced Prussians;
Jews — Hamburghers chiefly; — pure patriots, — Suabians; —
'Cappadocians and Elamites, Cretes and Arabians,
'And the dwellers in Pontus' . . . My muse will not weary
More lines with the list of them . . . *cur fremuere?*
What is it they murmur, and mutter, and hum?
Into what Pandemonium is Pentecost come?
Oh what is the name of the God at whose fane
Every nation is mix'd in so motley a train?
What weird Cabala lies on those tables outspread?
To what oracle turns with attention each head?
What holds these pale worshippers each so devout,
And what are those hierophants busied about?

XIII.

Here passes, repasses, and flits to and fro,
And rolls without ceasing, the great Yes and No:
Round this altar alternate the weird Passions dance,
And the God worshipp'd here is the old God of Chance.
Through the wide-open doors of the distant saloon
Flute, hautboy, and fiddle are squeaking in tune;
And an indistinct music forever is roll'd.

That mixes and chimes with the chink of the gold,
From a vision, that flits in a luminous haze,
Of figures forever eluding the gaze;
For there the Ball bounds like a wanton gazelle
Pursued by a bee through a warm golden dell;
It fleets through the doorway, it gleams on the glass,
And the weird words pursue it — *Pair, Impair, et Passe!*
Like a sound borne in sleep through such dreams as encumber
With haggard emotions the wild wicked slumber
Of some witch when she seeks, through a nightmare, to grab at
The hot hoof of the fiend, on her way to the Sabbat.

XIV.

The Duc de Luvois and Lord Alfred had met
Some few evenings ago (for the season as yet
Was but young) in this selfsame Pavilion of Chance.
The idler from England, the idler from France
Shook hands, each, of course, with much cordial pleasure:
An acquaintance at Ems is to most men a treasure,
And they both were too well-bred in aught to betray
One discourteous remembrance of things pass'd away.
'T was a sight that was pleasant, indeed, to be seen,
These two friends exchange greetings; — the men who had been
Foes so nearly in days that were past.
This, no doubt,
Is why, on the night I am speaking about,
My Lord Alfred sat down by himself at roulette,
Without one suspicion his bosom to fret.

Although he had left, with his pleasant French friend,
Matilda, half vex'd, at the room's farthest end.

XV.

'T is a fact, by all history placed beyond doubt,
That there needs nothing more a whole army to rout
Than one coward that takes to his heels; for, with speed,
His fellows are certain to follow the lead.
Lord Alfred his combat with Fortune began
With a few modest thalers — away they all ran —
The reserve follow'd fast in the rear. As his purse
Grew lighter, his spirits grew sensibly worse.
One needs not a Bacon to find a cause for it:
'T is an old law in physics — *Natura abhorret Vacuum* — and my lord, as he watch'd his last crown
Tumble into the bank, turn'd away with a frown
Which the brows of Napoleon himself might have deck'd
On that day of all days when an empire was wreck'd
On thy plain, Waterloo, and he witness'd the last
Of his favourite Guard cut to pieces, aghast!
Just then Alfred felt, he could scarcely tell why,
Within him the sudden strange sense that some eye
Had long been intently regarding him there, —
That some gaze was upon him too searching to bear.
He rose and look'd up. Was it fact? Was it fable?
Was it dream? Was it waking? Across the green table,
That face, with its features so fatally known —
Those eyes, whose deep gaze answer'd strangely his own —

What was it? Some ghost from its grave come again?
Some cheat of a feverish, fanciful brain?
Or was it herself — with those deep eyes of hers,
And that face unforgotten? — Lucile de Nevers!

XVI.

Ah, well that pale woman a phantom might seem,
Who appear'd to herself but the dream of a dream
'Neath those features so calm, that fair forehead so hush'd,
That pale cheek forever by passion unflush'd,
There yawn'd an insatiate void, and there heaved
A tumult of restless regrets unrelieved.
The brief noon of beauty was passing away,
And the chill of the twilight fell, silent and gray,
O'er that deep, self-perceived isolation of soul.
And now, as all round her the dim evening stole,
With its weird desolations, she inwardly grieved
For the want of that tender assurance received
From the warmth of a whisper, the glance of an eye,
Which should say, or should look, 'Fear thou naught, — *I* am by!'
And thus, through that lonely and self-fix'd existence
Crept a vague sense of silence, and horror, and distance:
A strange sort of faint-footed fear, — like a mouse
That comes out, when 't is dark, in some old ducal house,
Long deserted, where no one the creature can scare,
And the forms on the arras are all that move there

In Rome, — in the Forum, — there open'd one night
A gulf. All the augurs turn'd pale at the sight.
In this omen the anger of Heaven they read.
Men consulted the gods: then the oracle said: —

'Ever open this gulf shall endure, till at last
'That which Rome hath most precious within it be cast.'
The Romans threw in it their corn and their stuff,
But the gulf yawn'd as wide. Rome seem'd likely enough
To be ruin'd, ere this rent in her heart she could choke.
Then Curtius, revering the oracle, spoke:
'O Quirites! to this Heaven's question is come:
'What to Rome is most precious? The manhood of Rome.'
He plunged, and the gulf closed.
The tale is not new;
But the moral applies many ways, and is true.
How, for hearts rent in twain, shall the curse be destroy'd?
'T is a warm human life that must fill up the void.
Through many a heart runs the rent in the fable;
But who to discover a Curtius is able?

XVII.

Back she came from her long hiding-place, at the source
Of the sunrise; where, fair in their fabulous course,
Run the rivers of Eden: an exile again,
To the cities of Europe — the scenes, and the men,
And the life, and the ways, she had left: still oppress'd
With the same hungry heart, and unpeaceable breast.
The same, to the same things! The world she had quitted
With a sigh, with a sigh she re-enter'd. Soon flitted
Through the salons and clubs, to the great satisfaction
Of Paris, the news of a novel attraction.
The enchanting Lucile, the gay Countess, once more

To her old friend, the World, had reopen'd her door;
The World came, and shook hands, and was pleased and amused
With what the World then went away and abused.
From the woman's fair fame it in naught could detract,
'T was the woman's free genius it vex'd and attack'd
With a sneer at her freedom of action and speech.
But its light careless cavils, in truth, could not reach
The lone heart they aim'd at. Her tears fell beyond
The world's limit, to feel that the world could respond
To that heart's deepest, innermost yearning, in naught.
'T was no longer this earth's idler inmates she sought:
The wit of the woman sufficed to engage
In the woman's gay court the first men of the age.
Some had genius; and all, wealth of mind to confer
On the world: but that wealth was not lavish'd for her.
For the genius of man, though so human indeed,
When call'd out to man's help by some great human need,
The right to a man's chance acquaintance refuses
To use what it hoards for mankind's nobler uses.
Genius touches the world at but one point alone
Of that spacious circumference, never quite known
To the world: all the infinite number of lines
That radiate thither a mere point combines,
But one only, — some central affection apart
From the reach of the world, in which Genius is Heart,
And love, life's fine centre, includes heart and mind.
And therefore it was that Lucile sigh'd to find

Men of genius appear, one and all, in her ken,
When they stoop'd themselves to it, as mere clever men;
Artists, statesmen, and they in whose works are unfurl'd
Worlds new-fashion'd for man, as mere men of the world.
And so, as alone now she stood, in the sight
Of the sunset of youth, with her face toward the light,
And watch'd her own shadow grow long at her feet,
As though stretch'd out, the shade of some *other* to meet,
The woman felt homeless and childless: in scorn
She seem'd mock'd by the voices of children unborn;
And when from these sombre reflections away
She turn'd, with a sigh, to that gay world, more gay
For her presence within it, she knew herself friendless;
That her path led from peace, and that path appear'd endless!
That even her beauty had been but a snare,
And her wit sharpen'd only the edge of despair.

XVIII.

With a face all transfigured and flush'd by surprise,
Alfred turn'd to Lucile. With those deep searching eyes
She look'd into his own. Not a word that she said,
Not a look, not a blush, one emotion betray'd.
She seem'd to smile through him, at something beyond:
When she answer'd his questions, she seem'd to respond
To some voice in herself. With no trouble descried
To each troubled inquiry she calmly replied

Not so he. At the sight of that face back again
To his mind came the ghost of a long-stifled pain,
A remember'd resentment, half check'd by a wild
And relentful regret like a motherless child
Softly seeking admittance with plaintive appeal
To the heart which resisted its entrance.
Lucile
And himself thus, however, with freedom allow'd
To old friends, talking still side by side, left the crowd,
By the crowd unobserved. Not unnoticed, however,
By the Duke and Matilda. Matilda had never
Seen her husband's new friend.
She had follow'd by chance,
Or by instinct, the sudden half-menacing glance
Which the Duke, when he witness'd their meeting, had turn'd
On Lucile and Lord Alfred; and, scared, she discern'd
On his features the shade of a gloom so profound
That she shudder'd instinctively. Deaf to the sound
Of her voice, to some startled inquiry of hers
He replied not, but murmur'd, 'Lucile de Nevers
'Once again then? so be it!' In the mind of that man,
At that moment, there shaped itself vaguely the plan
Of a purpose malignant and dark, such alone
(To his own secret heart but imperfectly shown)
As could spring from the cloudy, fierce chaos of thought
By which all his nature to tumult was wrought.

XIX.

'So!' he thought, 'they meet thus: and reweave the old charm!
'And she hangs on his voice, and she leans on his arm,

'And she heeds me not, seeks me not, recks not of me!
'Oh, what if I show'd her that I, too, can be
'Loved by one — her own rival — more fair and more young?'
The serpent rose in him: a serpent which, stung,
Sought to sting.
Each unconscious, indeed, of the eye
Fix'd upon them, Lucile and my lord saunter'd by,
In converse which seem'd to be earnest. A smile
Now and then seem'd to show where their thoughts touch'd. Meanwhile
The Muse of this story, convinced that they need her,
To the Duke and Matilda returns, gentle Reader.

XX.

The Duke, with that sort of aggressive false praise
Which is meant a resentful remonstrance to raise
From the listener (as sometimes a judge, just before
He pulls down the black cap, very gently goes o'er
The case for the prisoner, and deals tenderly
With the man he is minded to hang by and by),
Had referr'd to Lucile, and then stopp'd to detect
In the face of Matilda the growing effect
Of the words he had dropp'd. There 's no weapon that slays
Its victim so surely (if well aim'd) as praise.
Thus, a pause on their converse had fallen: and now
Each was silent, preoccupied, thoughtful.
You know
There are moments when silence, prolong'd and unbroken,
More expressive may be than all words ever spoken.
It is when the heart has an instinct of what
In the heart of another is passing. And that
In the heart of Matilda, what was it? Whence came

To her cheek on a sudden that tremulous flame ?
What weigh'd down her head ?
All your eye could discover
Was the fact that Matilda was troubled. Moreover
That trouble the Duke's presence seem'd to renew.
She, however, broke silence, the first of the two.
The Duke was too prudent to shatter the spell
Of a silence which suited his purpose so well.
She was plucking the leaves from a pale blush-rose blossom
Which had fall'n from the nosegay she wore in her bosom :
'This poor flower,' she said, 'seems it not out of place
In this hot, lamplit air, with its fresh, fragile grace ?
She bent her head low as she spoke. With a smile
The Duke watch'd her caressing the leaves all the while,
And continued on his side the silence. He knew
This would force his companion their talk to renew
At the point that he wish'd ; and Matilda divined
The significant pause with new trouble of mind.
She lifted one moment her head ; but her look
Encounter'd the ardent regard of the Duke,
And dropp'd back on her flow'ret abash'd. Then still seeking
The assurance she fancied she show'd him by speaking,
She conceived herself safe in adopting again
The theme she should most have avoided just then.

XXI.

'Duke,' she said, . . . and she felt, as she spoke, her cheek burn'd,
'You know, then, this . . . lady ?'
'Too well ! he return'd.

LADY ALFRED.

True ; you drew with emotion her portrait just now.

THE DUKE.

With emotion?

LADY ALFRED.

Yes, yes! you described her, I know,
As possess'd of a charm all unrivall'd.

THE DUKE.

Alas!
You mistook me completely! You, madam, surpass
This Countess as moonlight does lamplight; as youth
Surpasses its best imitations; as truth
The fairest of falsehoods surpasses; as nature
Surpasses art's masterpiece; ay, as the creature
Fresh and pure in its native adornment surpasses
All the charms got by heart at the world's looking-glasses!

'Yet you said,' — she continued with some trepidation,
'That you quite comprehended' . . . a slight hesitation
Shook the sentence, . . . 'a passion so strong as' . .

THE DUKE.

True, true!
But not in a man that had once look'd at you.
Nor can I conceive, or excuse, or . . .

'Hush, hush!
She broke in, all more fair for one innocent blush.
'Between man and woman these things differ so!
'It may be that the world pardons . . . (how should I know?)
'In you what it visits on us; or 't is true,
'It may be, that we women are better than you.

THE DUKE.

Who denies it? Yet, madam, once more you mistake.
The world, in its judgment, some difference may make
'Twixt the man and the woman, so far as respects
Its social enactments; but not as affects
The one sentiment which, it were easy to prove,
Is the sole law we look to the moment we love.

LADY ALFRED.

That may be. Yet I think I should be less severe
Although so inexperienced in such things, I fear
I have learn'd that the heart cannot always repress
Or account for the feelings which sway it.

'Yes! yes!
'That is too true indeed!' . . . the Duke sigh'd.
And again
For one moment in silence continued the twain.

XXII.

At length the Duke slowly, as though he had needed
All this time to repress his emotions, proceeded:
'And yet! . . . what avails, then, to woman the gift
'Of a beauty like yours, if it cannot uplift
'Her heart from the reach of one doubt, one despair,
'One pang of wrong'd love, to which women less fair
'Are exposed, when they love?'
With a quick change of tone,
As tho' by resentment impell'd, he went on:—
'The name that you bear, it is whisper'd, you took
'From love, not convention. Well, lady, . . . that look
'So excited, so keen, on the face you must know

'Throughout all its expressions,—that rapturous glow—
'Those eloquent features—significant eyes—
'Which that pale woman sees, yet betrays no surprise,'
(He pointed his hand, as he spoke, to the door,
Fixing with it Lucile and Lord Alfred) . . . 'before.
'Have you ever once seen what just now you may view
'In that face so familiar? . . . no, lady, 't is new.
'Young, lovely, and loving, no doubt, as you are,
'Are you loved?' . . .

XXIII.

He look'd at her—paused—felt if thus far
The ground held yet. The ardour with which he had spoken,
This close, rapid question, thus suddenly broken,
Inspired in Matilda a vague sense of fear,
As though some indefinite danger were near.
With composure, however, at once she replied:—
''T is three years since the day when I first was a bride,
'And my husband I never had cause to suspect;
'Nor ever have stoop'd, sir, such cause to detect.
'Yet if in his looks or his acts I should see—
'See, or fancy—some moment's oblivion of me,
'I trust that I too should forget it,—for you
'Must have seen that my heart is my husband's.'
The hue
On her cheek, with the effort wherewith to the Duke
She had utter'd this vague and half-frighten'd rebuke,
Was white as the rose in her hand. The last word
Seem'd to die on her lip, and could scarcely be heard.
There was silence again.
A great step had been made

By the Duke in the words he that evening had said
There, half-drown'd by the music, Matilda, that night,
Had listen'd, — long listen'd — no doubt, in despite
Of herself, to a voice she should never had heard,
And her heart by that voice had been troubled and stirr'd.
And so, having suffer'd in silence his eye
To fathom her own, he resumed, with a sigh:

XXIV.

'Will you suffer me, lady, your thoughts to invade
'By disclosing my own? The position,' he said,
'In which we so strangely seem placed may excuse
'The frankness and force of the words which I use.
'You say that your heart is your husband's: you say
'That you love him. You think so, of course, lady . . . nay,
'Such a love, I admit, were a merit, no doubt.
'But, trust me, no true love there can be without
'Its dread penalty — jealousy.
'Well, do not start!
'Until now, — either thanks to a singular art
'Of supreme self-control, you have held them all down
'Unreveal'd in your heart, — or you never have known
'Even one of those fierce irresistible pangs
'Which deep passion engenders; that anguish which hangs
'On the heart like a nightmare, by jealousy bred.
'But if, lady, the love you describe, in the bed
'Of a blissful security thus hath reposed
'Undisturb'd with mild eyelids on happiness closed,
'Were it not to expose to a peril unjust,
'And most cruel, that happy repose you so trust,
'To meet, to receive, and, indeed, it may be,
'For how long I know not, continue to see

'A woman whose place rivals yours in the life
'And the heart which not only your title of wife,
'But also (forgive me!) your beauty alone,
'Should have made wholly yours? — You, who gave all your own!
'Reflect! — 't is the peace of existence you stake
'On the turn of a die. And for whose — for his sake? —
While you witness this woman, the false point of view
'From which she must now be regarded by you
'Will exaggerate to you, whatever they be,
'The charms I admit she possesses. To me
'They are trivial indeed: yet to your eyes, I fear
'And foresee, they will true and intrinsic appear.
'Self unconscious, and sweetly unable to guess
'How more lovely by far is the grace you possess,
'You will wrong your own beauty. The graces of art,
'You will take for the natural charm of the heart;
'Studied manners, the brilliant and bold repartee,
'Will too soon in that fatal comparison be
'To your fancy more fair than that sweet timid sense
'Which, in shrinking, betrays its own best eloquence.
'O then, lady, then you will feel in your heart
'The poisonous pain of a fierce jealous dart!
'While you see her, yourself you no longer will see, —
'You will hear her, and hear not yourself, — you will be
'Unhappy; unhappy because you will deem
'Your own power less great than her power will seem.
'And I shall not be by your side, day by day,
'In despite of your noble displeasure, to say
'"You are fairer than she, as the star is more fair
'"Than the diamond, the brightest that beauty can wear!"'

XXV.

This appeal, both by looks and by language, increased
The trouble Matilda felt grow in her breast.
Still she spoke with what calmness she could —
'Sir, the while
'I thank you,' she said, with a faint scornful smile,
'For your fervour in painting my fancied distress:
'Allow me the right some surprise to express
'At the zeal you betray in disclosing to me
'The possible depth of my own misery.'

'That zeal would not startle you, madam,' he said,
'Could you read in my heart, as myself I have read,
'The peculiar interest which causes that zeal —'

Matilda her terror no more could conceal.
'Duke,' she answer'd in accents short, cold, and severe,
As she rose from her seat, 'I continue to hear;
'But permit me to say, I no more understand.'

'Forgive!' with a nervous appeal of the hand,
And a well-feign'd confusion of voice and of look,
'Forgive, oh, forgive me!' at once cried the Duke.
'I forgot that you know me so slightly. Your leave
'I entreat (from your anger those words to retrieve)
'For one moment to speak of myself, — for I think
'That you wrong me —'
His voice, as in pain, seem'd to sink;
And tears in his eyes, as he lifted them, glisten'd.

XXVI.

Matilda, despite of herself, sat and listen'd.

XXVII.

'Beneath an exterior which seems, and may be,
'Worldly, frivolous, careless, my heart hides in me,'
He continued, 'a sorrow which draws me to side
'With all things that suffer. Nay, laugh not,' he cried,
'At so strange an avowal.
'I seek at a ball,
'For instance, — the beauty admired by all?
'No! some plain, insignificant creature, who sits
'Scorn'd of course by the beauties, and shunn'd by the wits.
'All the world is accustom'd to wound, or neglect,
'Or oppress, claims my heart and commands my respect.
'No Quixote, I do not affect to belong,
'I admit, to those charter'd redressers of wrong;
'But I seek to console, where I can. 'T is a part
'Not brilliant, I own, yet its joys bring no smart.'
These trite words, from the tone which he gave them, received
An appearance of truth, which might well be believed
By a heart shrewder yet than Matilda's.
And so
He continued . . . 'O lady! alas, could you know
'What injustice and wrong in this world I have seen!
'How many a woman, believed to have been
'Without a regret, I have known turn aside
'To burst into heart-broken tears undescried!
'On how many a lip have I witness'd the smile
Which but hid what was breaking the poor heart the while!'
Said Matilda, 'Your life, it would seem, then, must be
'One long act of devotion.'

'Perhaps so,' said he;
'But at least that devotion small merit can boast,
'For one day may yet come, — if *one* day at the most, —
When, perceiving at last all the difference — how great! —
''Twixt the heart that neglects, and the heart that can wait,
''Twixt the natures that pity, the natures that pain,
'Some woman, that else might have pass'd in disdain
'Or indifference by me, — in passing *that* day
'Might pause, with a word or a smile, to repay
'This devotion, — and then' . . .

XXVIII.

To Matilda's relief
At that moment her husband approach'd.
With some grief
I must own that her welcome, perchance, was express'd
The more eagerly just for one twinge in her breast
Of a conscience disturb'd, and her smile not less warm,
Though she saw the Comtesse de Nevers on his arm.
The Duke turn'd, and adjusted his collar.
Thought he,
'Good! the gods fight my battle to-night. I foresee
'That the family doctor's the part I must play.
'Very well! but the patients my visits shall pay.'
Lord Alfred presented Lucile to his wife;
And Matilda, repressing with effort the strife
Of emotions which made her voice shake, murmur'd low
Some faint, troubled greeting. The Duke, with a bow
Which betoken'd a distant defiance, replied
To Lucile's startled cry, as surprised she descried

Her former gay wooer. Anon, with the grace
Of that kindness which seeks to win kindness, her place
She assumed by Matilda, unconscious perchance,
Or resolved not to notice, the half-frighten'd glance
That follow'd that movement.
The Duke to his feet
Arose; and, in silence, relinquish'd his seat.
One must own that the moment was awkward for all;
But nevertheless, before long, the strange thrall
Of Lucile's gracious tact was by every one felt,
And from each the reserve seem'd, reluctant, to melt;
Thus, conversing together, the whole of the four
Thro' the crowd saunter'd, smiling.

XXIX.

Approaching the door,
Eugène de Luvois, who had fallen behind,
By Lucile, after some hesitation, was join'd
With a gesture of gentle and kindly appeal
Which appear'd to imply, without words, 'Let us feel
'That the friendship between us in years that are fled,
'Has survived one mad moment forgotten,' she said,
'You remain, Duke, at Ems?'
He turn'd on her a look
Of frigid, resentful, and sullen rebuke;
And then, with a more than significant glance
At Matilda, maliciously answer'd, 'Perchance
'I have here an attraction. And you?' he return'd.
Lucile's eyes had follow'd his own, and discern'd
The boast they implied.
He repeated, 'And you?
And, still watching Matilda, she answer'd, 'I too.

And he thought, as with that word she left him, she
sigh'd.
The next moment her place she resumed by the
side
Of Matilda; and soon they shook hands at the gate
Of the selfsame hotel.

XXX.

One depress'd, one elate,
The Duke and Lord Alfred again, thro' the glooms
Of the thick linden alley, return'd to the Rooms.
His cigar each had lighted, a moment before,
At the inn, as they turn'd, arm-in-arm, from the
door.
Ems cigars do not cheer a man's spirits, *experto*
(*Me miserum quoties!*) *crede Roberto.*
In silence, awhile, they walk'd onward.
At last
The Duke's thoughts to language half-consciously
pass'd.

THE DUKE.

Once more! yet once more!

LORD ALFRED.

What?

THE DUKE.

We meet her, once more,
The woman for whom we two madmen of yore
(Laugh, *mon cher Alfred*, laugh!) were about to
destroy
Each other!

LORD ALFRED.

It is not with laughter that I
Raise the ghost of that once troubled time. Say! can
you
Recall it with coolness and quietude now?

THE DUKE.

Now? yes! I, *mon cher*, am a true *Parisien:*
Now, the red revolution, the tocsin, and then
The dance and the play. I am now at the play.

LORD ALFRED.

At the play, are you now? Then perchance I now may
Presume, Duke, to ask you what, ever until
Such a moment, I waited . . . .

THE DUKE.

Oh! ask what you will.
Franc jeu! on the table my cards I spread out.
Ask!

LORD ALFRED.

Duke, you were call'd to a meeting (no doubt
You remember it yet) with Lucile. It was night
When you went; and before you return'd it was light.
We met: you accosted me then with a brow
Bright with triumph: your words (you remember them now?)
Were, 'Let us be friends!'

THE DUKE.

Well?

LORD ALFRED.

How then, after that,
Can you and she meet as acquaintances?

THE DUKE.

What
Did she not then, herself, the Comtesse de Nevers,
Solve your riddle to-night with those soft lips of hers?

LORD ALFRED.

In our converse to-night we avoided the past.
But the question I ask should be answer'd at last:
By you, if you will; if you will not, by her.

THE DUKE.

Indeed? but that question, milord, can it stir
Such an interest in you, if your passion be o'er?

LORD ALFRED.

Yes. Esteem may remain, altho' love be no more.
Lucile ask'd me, this night, to my wife (understand
To *my wife!*) to present her. I did so. Her hand
Has clasp'd that of Matilda. We gentlemen owe
Respect to the name that is ours: and, if so,
To the woman that bears it a twofold respect.
Answer, Duc de Luvois! Did Lucile then reject
The proffer you made of your hand and your name?
Or did you on her love then relinquish a claim
Urged before? I ask bluntly this question, because
My title to do so is clear by the laws
That all gentlemen honour. Make only one sign
That you know of Lucile de Nevers aught, in fine,
For which, if your own virgin sister were by,
From Lucile you would shield her acquaintance, and I
And Matilda leave Ems on the morrow.

XXXI.

The Duke
Hesitated and paused. He could tell, by the look
Of the man at his side, that he meant what he said,
And there flash'd in a moment these thoughts thro' his head:

'Leave Ems! would that suit me? no! that were again
'To mar all. And besides, if I do not explain,
'She herself will . . . *et puis, il a raison ; on est*
'*Gentilhomme après tout!*' He replied, therefore, 'Nay!
'Madame de Nevers had rejected me. I,
'In those days, I was mad; and in some mad reply
'I threaten'd the life of the rival to whom
'That rejection was due, I was led to presume.
'She fear'd for his life; and the letter which then
'She wrote me, I show'd you; we met: and again
'My hand was refused, and my love was denied.
'And the glance you mistook was the vizard which Pride
'Lends to Humiliation.'
'And so,' half in jest
He went on, 'in this best world, 't is all for the best!
'You are wedded (bless'd Englishman!), wedded to one
'Whose past can be call'd into question by none
'And I (fickle Frenchman!) can still laugh to feel
'I am lord of myself, and the Mode: and Lucile
'Still shines from her pedestal, frigid and fair
'As yon German moon o'er the linden-tops there!
'A Dian in marble that scorns any troth
'With the little love-gods, whom I thank for us both,
'While she smiles from her lonely Olympus apart,
'That her arrows are marble as well as her heart.
'Stay at Ems, Alfred Vargrave!'

XXXII.

The Duke, with a smile,
Turn'd and enter'd the Rooms which, thus talking, meanwhile,
They had reach'd.

XXXIII.

Alfred Vargrave strode on (overthrown
Heart and mind!) in the darkness bewilder'd, alone:
'And so,' to himself did he mutter, 'and so
''T was to rescue my life, gentle spirit! and, oh,
'For this did I doubt her? . . . a light word — a look —
'The mistake of a moment! . . . for this I forsook —
'For this? Pardon, pardon, Lucile! O Lucile!'
Thought and memory rang, like a funeral peal,
Weary changes on one dirge-like note thro' his brain,
As he stray'd down the darkness.

XXXIV.

Re-entering again
The Casino, the Duke smiled. He turn'd to roulette,
And sat down, and play'd fast, and lost largely, and yet
He still smiled: night deepen'd: he play'd his last number:
Went home: and soon slept: and still smiled in his slumber.

XXXV.

In his desolate Maxims, La Rochefoucauld wrote,
'In the grief or mischance of a friend, you may note,
'There is something which always gives pleasure.'
Alas
That reflection fell short of the truth as it was.
La Rochefoucauld might have as truly set down —
No misfortune, but what *some* one turns to his own
Advantage its mischief: no sorrow, but of it
'There ever is somebody ready to profit:

'No affliction without its stock-jobbers, who all
'Gamble, speculate, play on the rise and the fall
'Of another man's heart, and make traffic in it.'
Burn thy book, O La Rochefoucauld!
Fool! one man's wit
All men's selfishness how should it fathom?
O sage,
Dost thou satirize Nature?
She laughs at thy page.

CANTO II.

I.

COUSIN JOHN TO COUSIN ALFRED.

'London, 18—

'MY dear Alfred,
'Your last letters put me in pain
'This contempt of existence, this listless disdain
'Of your own life, — its joys and its duties, — the deuce
'Take my wits if they find for it half an excuse!
'I wish that some Frenchman would shoot off your leg,
'And compel you to stump through the world on a peg.
'I wish that you had, like myself (more's the pity!),
'To sit seven hours on this cursed committee.
'I wish that you knew, sir, how salt is the bread
'Of another — (what is it that Dante has said?)
'And the trouble of other men's stairs. In a word,
'I wish fate had some real affliction conferr'd
'On your whimsical self, that, at least, you had cause
'For neglecting life's duties, and damning its laws!
'This pressure against all the purpose of life,
'This self-ebullition, and ferment, and strife,
'Betoken'd, I grant that it may be in truth,
'The richness and strength of the new wine of youth.
'But if, when the wine should have mellow'd with time,
'Being bottled and binn'd, to a flavour sublime,
'It retains the same acrid, incongruous taste,
'Why, the sooner to throw it away that we haste

'The better, I take it. And this vice of snarling,
'Self-love's little lapdog, the over-fed darling
'Of a hypochondriacal fancy, appears,
'To my thinking at least, in a man of your years,
'At the midnoon of manhood, with plenty to do,
'And every incentive for doing it too, —
'With the duties of life just sufficiently pressing
'For prayer, and of joys more than most men for blessing;
'With a pretty young wife, and a pretty full purse, —
'Like poltroonery, puerile truly, or worse!
'I wish I could get you at least to agree
'To take life as it is, and consider with me,
'If it be not all smiles, that it is not all sneers;
'It admits honest laughter, and needs honest tears.
'Do you think none have known but yourself all the pain
'Of hopes that retreat, and regrets that remain?
'And all the wide distance fate fixes, no doubt,
''Twixt the life that's within, and the life that's without?
'What one of us finds the world just as he likes?
'Or gets what he wants when he wants it? Or strikes
'Without missing the thing that he strikes at the first?
'Or walks without stumbling? Or quenches his thirst
'At one draught? Bah! I tell you! I, bachelor John,
'Have had griefs of my own. But what then? I push on
'All the faster perchance that I yet feel the pain
'Of my last fall, albeit I may stumble again.
'God means every man to be happy, be sure.
'He sends us no sorrows that have not some cure.
'Our duty down here is to do, not to know.
'Live as though life were earnest, and life will be so.

'Let each moment, like Time's last ambassador, come:
'It will wait to deliver its message; and some
'Sort of answer it merits. It is not the deed
'A man does, but the way that he does it, should plead
'For the man's compensation in doing it.
'Here,
'My next neighbour 's a man with twelve thousand a year,
'Who deems that life has not a pastime more pleasant
'Than to follow a fox, or to slaughter a pheasant.
'Yet this fellow goes through a contested election,
'Lives in London, and sits, like the soul of dejection,
'All the day through upon a committee, and late
'To the last, every night, through the dreary debate,
'As though he were getting each speaker by heart,
'Though amongst them he never presumes to take part.
'One asks one's self why, without murmur or question,
'He foregoes all his tastes, and destroys his digestion,
'For a labour of which the result seems so small.
'"The man is ambitious," you say. Not at all.
'He has just sense enough to be fully aware
'That he never can hope to be Premier, or share
'The renown of a Tully;—or even to hold
'A subordinate office. He is not so bold
'As to fancy the House for ten minutes would bear
'With patience his modest opinions to hear.
'"But he wants something!"
'What! with twelve thousand a year?
'What could Government give him would be half so dear
'To his heart as a walk with a dog and a gun

'Through his own pheasant woods, or a capital run?
'"No; but vanity fills out the emptiest brain;
'The man would be more than his neighbours, 't is plain;
'And the drudgery drearily gone through in town
'Is more than repaid by provincial renown.
'Enough if some Marchioness, lively and loose,
'Shall have eyed him with passing complaisance; the goose,
'If the Fashion to him open one of its doors,
'As proud as a sultan, returns to his boors."
'Wrong again! if you think so.
'For, *primo;* my friend
'Is the head of a family known from one end
'Of his shire to the other, as the oldest; and therefore
'He despises fine lords and fine ladies. *He* care for
A peerage? no truly! *Secondo;* he rarely
'Or never goes out: dines at Bellamy's sparely,
'And abhors what you call the gay world.
'Then, I ask,
'What inspires, and consoles, such a self-imposed task
'As the life of this man, — but the sense of its duty?
'And I swear that the eyes of the haughtiest beauty
'Have never inspired in my soul that intense,
'Reverential, and loving, and absolute sense
'Of heart-felt admiration I feel for this man,
'As I see him beside me; — there, wearing the wan
'London daylight away, on his humdrum committee;
'So unconscious of all that awakens my pity,
'And wonder — and worship, I might say.
'To me

'There seems something nobler than genius to be
'In that dull patient labor no genius relieves,
'That absence of all joy which yet never grieves;
'The humility of it! the grandeur withal!
'The sublimity of it! And yet, should you call
'The man's own very slow apprehension to this,
'He would ask, with a stare, what sublimity is!
'His work is the duty to which he was born;
'He accepts it, without ostentation or scorn:
'And this man is no uncommon type (I thank
Heaven!)
'Of this land's common men. In all other lands,
even
'The type's self is wanting. Perchance, 't is the
reason
'That government oscillates ever 'twixt treason
'And tyranny elsewhere.
'I wander away
'Too far, though, from what I was wishing to say.
'You, for instance, read Plato. You know that the
soul
'Is immortal; and put this in rhyme, on the whole,
'Very well, with sublime illustration. Man's heart
'Is a mystery, doubtless. You trace it in art: —
'The Greek Psyche, — that 's beauty, — the perfect
ideal:
'But then comes the imperfect, perfectible real,
'With its pain'd aspiration and strife. In those
pale
'Ill-drawn virgins of Giotto you see it prevail.
'You have studied all this. Then, the universe,
too,
'is not a mere house to be lived in, for you.
'Geology opens the mind. So you know
'Something also of strata and fossils; these show
'The bases of cosmical structure: some mention
'Of the nebulous theory demands your attention;
'And so on.
'In short, it is clear the interior

'Of your brain, my dear Alfred, is vastly superior
'In fibre, and fulness, and function, and fire,
'To that of my poor parliamentary squire;
'But your life leaves upon me (forgive me this heat
'Due to friendship) the sense of a thing incomplete.
You fly high. But what is it, in truth, you fly at?
'My mind is not satisfied quite as to that.
'An old illustration 's as good as a new,
'Provided the old illustration be true.
'We are children. Mere kites are the fancies we fly,
'Though we marvel to see them ascending so high;
'Things slight in themselves, — long-tail'd toys, and no more!
What is it that makes the kite steadily soar
'Through the realms where the cloud and the whirlwind have birth,
But the tie that attaches the kite to the earth?
'I remember the lessons of childhood, you see,
'And the hornbook I learn'd on my poor mother's knee.
'In truth, I suspect little else do we learn
'From this great book of life, which so shrewdly we turn,
'Saving how to apply, with a good or bad grace,
'What we learn'd in the hornbook of childhood.
'Your case
'Is exactly in point.
'Fly your kite, if you please,
'Out of sight: let it go where it will, on the breeze;
'But cut not the one thread by which it is bound,
'Be it never so high, to this poor human ground.
'No man is the absolute lord of his life.
'You, my friend, have a home, and a sweet and dear wife.

'If I often have sigh'd by my own silent fire,
'With the sense of a sometimes recurring desire
'For a voice sweet and low, or a face fond and fair,
'Some dull winter evening to solace and share
'With the love which the world its good children allows
'To shake hands with, — in short, a legitimate spouse,
'This thought has consoled me: "at least I have given
'For my own good behaviour no hostage to heaven."
'You have, though. Forget it not! faith, if you do,
'I would rather break stones on a road than be you.
'If any man wilfully injured, or led
'That little girl wrong, I would sit on his head,
'Even though you yourself were the sinner!
'And this
'Leads me back (do not take it, dear cousin, amiss!)
'To the matter I meant to have mention'd at once,
'But these thoughts put it out of my head for the nonce.
'Of all the preposterous humbugs and shams,
'Of all the old wolves ever taken for lambs,
'The wolf best received by the flock he devours
'Is that uncle-in-law, my dear Alfred, of yours.
'At least, this has long been my settled conviction,
And I almost would venture at once the prediction
'That before very long — but no matter! I trust
'For his sake and our own, that I may be unjust.
But Heaven forgive me, if cautious I am on
'The score of such men as, with both God and Mammon,

'Seem so shrewdly familiar.
'Neglect not this warning.
'There were rumours afloat in the City this morning
'Which I scarce like the sound of. Who knows? would he fleece
'At a pinch, the old hypocrite, even his own niece?
'For the sake of Matilda I cannot importune
'Your attention too early. If all your wife's fortune
'Is yet in the hands of that specious old sinner,
'Who would dice with the devil, and yet rise up winner,
'I say, lose no time! get it out of the grab
'Of her trustee and relative, Ridley MacNab.
'I trust those deposits, at least, are drawn out,
'And safe at this moment from danger or doubt.
'A wink is as good as a nod to the wise.
'*Verbum sap.* I admit nothing yet justifies
My mistrust; but I have in my own mind a notion
That old Ridley's white waistcoat, and airs of devotion,
Have long been the only ostensible capital
On which he does business. If so, time must sap it all,
Sooner or later. Look sharp. Do not wait,
Draw at once. In a fortnight it may be too late.
I admit I know nothing. I can but suspect;
I give you my notions. Form yours, and reflect.
'My love to Matilda. Her mother looks well.
'I saw her last week. I have nothing to tell
'Worth your hearing. We think that the government here
'Will not last out next session. Fitz Funk is a peer,
'You will see by the Times. There are symptoms which show
'That the ministers now are preparing to go,
'And finish their feast of the loaves and the fishes

'It is evident that they are clearing the dishes,
'And cramming their pockets with bon-bons. Your
news
Will be always acceptable. Vere, of the Blues,
'Has bolted with Lady Selina. And so,
'You have met with that hot-headed Frenchman? I
know
'That the man is a sad *mauvais sujet*. Take
care
'Of Matilda. I wish I could join you both there;
'But, before I am free, you are sure to be gone.
'Good-by, my dear fellow.

'Yours, anxiously,
'JOHN.'

II.

This is just the advice I myself would have given
To Lord Alfred, had I been his cousin, which
Heaven
Be praised, I am not. But it reach'd him indeed
In an unlucky hour, and received little heed.
A half-languid glance was the most that he lent at
That time to these homilies. *Primum dementat*
Quem Deus vult perdere. Alfred in fact
Was behaving just then in a way to distract
Job's self had Job known him. The more you'd
have thought
The Duke's court to Matilda his eye would have
caught,
The more did his aspect grow listless to hers,
And the more did it beam to Lucile de Nevers.
And Matilda, the less she found love in the look
Of her husband, the less did she shrink from the
Duke.
With each day that pass'd o'er them, they each,
heart from heart,
Woke to feel themselves further and further apart.
More and more of his time Alfred pass'd at the
table,

Play'd high and lost more than to lose he was
able.
He grew feverish, querulous, absent, perverse, —
And here I must mention, what made matters
worse,
That Lucile and the Duke at the selfsame hotel
With the Vargraves resided. It needs not to tell
That they all saw too much of each other. The
weather
Was so fine that it brought them each day all
together
In the garden, — to listen, of course, to the band.
The house was a sort of phalanstery; and
Lucile and Matilda were pleased to discover
A mutual passion for music. Moreover
The Duke was an excellent tenor: could sing
'*Ange si pure*' in a way to bring down on the wing
All the angels St. Cicely play'd to. My lord
Would also at times, when he was not too bored,
Play Beethoven, and Wagner's new music, not ill;
With some little things of his own, showing skill.
For which reason, as well as for some others too,
Their rooms were a pleasant enough rendezvous.
Did Lucile, then, encourage (the heartless co-
quette!)
All the mischief she could not but mark?
Patience yet!

III.

In that garden, an arbour, withdrawn from the sun,
By laburnum and lilac with blooms overrun,
Form'd a vault of cool verdure, which made, when
the heat
Of the noontide hung heavy, a gracious retreat.
And here, with some friends of their own little
world,
In the warm afternoons, till the shadows uncurl'd
From the feet of the lindens, and crept thro' the
grass,

Their blue hours would this gay little colony pass.
The men loved to smoke, and the women to bring,
Undeterr'd by tobacco, their work there, and sing
Or converse, till the dew fell, and homeward the bee
Floated, heavy with honey. Towards eve there was tea
(A luxury due to Matilda), and ice,
Fruit, and coffee. Ὦ Ἔσπερε, πάντα φέρεις!
Such an evening it was, while Matilda presided
O'er the rustic arrangements thus daily provided,
With the Duke, and a small German Prince with a thick head,
And an old Russian Countess both witty and wicked,
And two Austrian Colonels, — that Alfred, who yet
Was lounging alone with his last cigarette,
Saw Lucile de Nevers by herself pacing slow
'Neath the shade of the cool linden-trees to and fro,
And joining her, cried, 'Thank the good stars, we meet!
'I have so much to say to you!'
'Yes? . .' with her sweet
Serene voice, she replied to him . . 'Yes? and I too
Was wishing, indeed, to say somewhat to you.'
She was paler just then than her wont was. The sound
Of her voice had within it a sadness profound.
'You are ill?' he exclaim'd.
'No!' she hurriedly said,
'No, no!'
'You alarm me!'
She droop'd down her head.
'If your thoughts have of late sought, or cared, to divine
'The purpose of what has been passing in mine,
'My farewell can scarcely alarm you.'

LORD ALFRED.

Lucile!
Your farewell! you go!

THE COUNTESS.

Yes, Lord Alfred.

LORD ALFRED.

Reveal
The cause of this sudden unkindness.

THE COUNTESS.

Unkind?

LORD ALFRED.

Yes! what else is this parting?

THE COUNTESS.

No, no! are you blind?
Look into your own heart and home. Can you see
No reason for this, save unkindness in me?
Look into the eyes of your wife — those true eyes
Too pure and too honest in aught to disguise
The sweet soul shining thro' them.

LORD ALFRED.

Lucile! (first and last
Be the word, if you will!) let me speak of the past.
I know now, alas! tho' I know it too late,
What pass'd at that meeting which settled my fate.
Nay, nay, interrupt me not yet! let it be!
I but say what is due to yourself — due to me,
And *must* say it.
He rush'd incoherently on,
Describing how, lately, the truth he had known,
To explain how, and whence, he had wrong'd her
before,
All the complicate coil wound about him of yore,

All the hopes that had flown with the faith that was fled,
And then, O Lucile, what was left me,' he said,
When my life was defrauded of you, but to take
That life, as 't was left, and endeavour to make
Unobserved by another, the void which remain'd
Unconceal'd to myself? If I have not attain'd,
'I have striven. One word of unkindness has never
'Pass'd my lips to Matilda. Her least wish has ever
'Received my submission. And if, of a truth,
'I have fail'd to renew what I felt in my youth,
'I at least have been loyal to what I *do* feel,
'Respect, duty, honour, affection. Lucile,
'I speak not of love now, nor love's lone regret:
'I would not offend you, nor dare I forget
'The ties that are round me. But may there not be
'A friendship yet hallow'd between you and me?
'O Lucile, answer yes! say, indeed, must I deem
'That dream of the Greek nothing more than a dream,
'Which, of yore, in our youth, ere it could be for us
'Aught, in truth, save a theme it was sweet to discuss
With all else of those loved Grecian teachers of ours, —
'That dream of two souls, from the same parent powers,
'Which, tho' virgin in heart, are yet married in mind,
'Like those twin stars which seem, tho' so distant, combined?
'Is this creed a delusion in faith, and in act
A crime? or, Lucile, may we be not, in fact,
'To each other yet friends — friends the dearest?
'Alas!'

She replied, 'for one moment, perchance, did it pass
Thro' my own heart, that dream which forever hath brought
'To those who indulge it in innocent thought
'So fatal and evil a waking! But no.
'For in lives such as ours are, the Dream-tree would grow
'On the borders of Hades: beyond it, what lies?
'The wheel of Ixion, alas! and the cries
'Of the lost and tormented. Departed, for us,
'Are the days when with innocence we could discuss
'Dreams like these. Fled, indeed, are the dreams of *my* life!
'Oh trust me, the best friend you have is your wife.
'And I — in that pure child's pure virtue, I bow
'To the beauty of virtue. I felt on my brow
'Not one blush when I first took her hand. With no blush
'Shall I clasp it to-night, when I leave you.
'Hush! hush!
'I would say what I wish'd to have said when you came.
'Do not think that years leave us and finds us the same!
'The woman you knew long ago, long ago,
'Is no more. You yourself have within you, I know,
'The germ of a joy in the years yet to be,
'Whereby the past years will bear fruit. As for me,
'I go my own way, — onward, upward!
'O yet,
'Let me thank you for that which ennobled regret,
'When it came, as it beautified hope ere it fled, —
'The love I once felt for you. True, it is dead,
'But it is not corrupted. I too have at last
'Lived to learn that love is not — (such love as is past,

'Such love as youth dreams of at least) — the sole part
'Of life, which is able to fill up the heart;
'Even that of a woman. Whoever indeed
'Is useful cannot be unhappy. This creed
'Fills the void of existence. Between you and me
Heaven fixes a gulf, over which, you must see,
'That our guardian angels can bear us no more.
'We each of us stand on an opposite shore.
'One step forward, and down the abyss we should sink.
'Oh, the day will come yet, and more soon than you think,
'When life's hopes will all be new born in your heart.
'And I see in it, hidden, yet ready to start
'Into blossom, more brightly than ever, the flower
'Which you deem to be wither'd. For who knows the power
'Of self-renovation in man? What is more,
'You will wake up and find, when this slumber is o'er,
'At your right hand a heart destined, trust me, to prove
'The fulfilment of all you have dream'd of in love.
'Trust a woman's opinion for once. Women learn,
'By an instinct men never attain, to discern
'Each other's true natures. Matilda is fair,
'Matilda is young — see her now, sitting there! —
'How tenderly fashion'd — (oh, is she not, say,)
'To love and be loved?'

IV.

He turn'd sharply away
'Matilda is young, and Matilda is fair;
'Of all that you tell me pray deem me aware;
'But Matilda 's a statue, Matilda 's a child;
Matilda loves not — '
Lucile quietly smiled

As she answer'd him:—'Yesterday, all that you say
'Might be true; it is false, wholly false, though,
to-day.'

'How?—what mean you?'
'I mean that to-day,' she replied
'The statue with life has become vivified:
'I mean that the child to a woman has grown:
And that woman is jealous.'
'What! she?' with a tone
Of ironical wonder, he answer'd—'what, she!
'She jealous!—Matilda!—of whom, pray?—not
me!'

'My lord, you deceive yourself; no one but you
Is she jealous of. Trust, me. And thank Heaven,
too,
That so lately this passion within her hath grown.
For who shall declare, if for months she had
known
'What for days she has known all too keenly, I fear,
'That knowledge perchance might have cost you
more dear?'

'Explain! explain, madam!' he cried in surprise
And terror and anger enkindled his eyes.

'How blind are you men!' she replied. 'Can you
doubt
'That a woman, young, fair, and neglected—'
'Speak out!
He gasp'd with emotion. 'Lucile! you mean—
what?
'Do you doubt her fidelity?'
'Certainly not.
'Listen to me, my friend. What I wish to explain
'Is so hard to shape forth. I could almost refrain
'From touching a subject so fragile. However,
'Bear with me awhile, if I frankly endeavour

'To invade for one moment your innermost life.
'Your honour, Lord Alfred, and that of your wife,
'Are dear to me, — most dear! And I am convinced
That you rashly are risking that honour.'
He winced,
And turn'd pale, as she spoke.
She had aim'd at his heart,
And she saw, by his sudden and terrified start,
That her aim had not miss'd.
'Stay, Lucile!' he exclaim'd,
'What in truth do you mean by these words, vaguely framed
'To alarm me? Matilda? — my wife? — do you know?' —

'I know that your wife is as spotless as snow.
'But I know not how far your continued neglect
'Her nature, as well as her heart, might affect.
'Till at last, by degrees, that serene atmosphere
'Of her unconscious purity, faint and yet clear,
'Like the indistinct golden and vaporous fleece
'Which surrounded and hid the celestials in Greece
'From the glances of men, would disperse and depart
'At the sighs of a sick and delirious heart, —
'For jealousy is to a woman, be sure,
'A disease heal'd too oft by a criminal cure;
'And the heart left too long to its ravage, in time
'May find weakness in virtue, reprisal in crime.'

V.

'Such thoughts could have never,' he falter'd, 'I know,
'Reach'd the heart of Matilda.'
'Matilda? oh no
'But reflect! when such thoughts do not come of themselves

'To the heart of a woman neglected, like elves
'That seek lonely places, — there rarely is wanting
'Some voice at her side, with an evil enchanting
'To conjure them to her.'
'O lady, beware!
'At this moment, around me I search everywhere
'For a clew to your words' —
'You mistake them,' she said,
Half fearing, indeed, the effect they had made.
'I was putting a mere hypothetical case' —

With a long look of trouble he gazed in her face.
'Woe to him, . . .' he exclaim'd . . . 'woe to him
that should feel
'Such a hope! for I swear, if he did but reveal
'One glimpse, — it should be the last hope of his
life!'
The clench'd hand and bent eyebrow betoken'd the
strife
She had roused in his heart.
'You forget,' she began,
'That you menace yourself. You yourself are the
man
'That is guilty. Alas! must it ever be so?
'Do we stand in our own light, wherever we go,
'And fight our own shadows forever? O think!
'The trial from which you, the stronger ones,
shrink,
'You ask woman, the weaker one, still to endure;
'You bid her be true to the laws you abjure;
'To abide by the ties you yourselves rend asunder,
'With the force that has fail'd you; and that too,
when under
'The assumption of rights which to her you refuse,
'The immunity claim'd for yourselves you abuse!
'Where the contract exists, it involves obligation
'To both husband and wife, in an equal relation.
'You unloose, in asserting your own liberty,
'A knot, which, unloosed, leaves another as free

'Then, O Alfred! be juster at heart: and thank
Heaven
'That Heaven to your wife such a nature has given
'That you have not wherewith to reproach her
albeit
'You have cause to reproach your own self, could
you see it!'

VI.

In the silence that follow'd the last word she said.
In the heave of his chest, and the droop of his head,
Poor Lucile mark'd her words had sufficed to im-
part
A new germ of motion and life to that heart
Of which he himself had so recently spoken
As dead to emotion — exhausted, or broken!
New fears would awaken new hopes in his life.
In the husband indifferent no more to the wife
She already, as she had foreseen, could discover
That Matilda had gain'd, at her hands, a new lover
So after some moments of silence, whose spell
They both felt, she extended her hand to him. . . .

VII.

'Well?

VIII.

'Lucile,' he replied, as that soft, quiet hand
In his own he clasp'd warmly, 'I both understand
'And obey you.'
'Thank Heaven!' she murmur'd.
'Oh, yet,
'One word, I beseech you! I cannot forget,'
He exclaim'd, 'we are parting for life. You have
shown
'My pathway to me: but say, what is your own?'
The calmness with which until then she had spoken
In a moment seem'd strangely and suddenly broken
She turn'd from him nervously, hurriedly.

'Nay,
I know not,' she murmur'd, 'I follow the way
'Heaven leads me; I cannot foresee to what end.
'I know only that far, far away it must tend
'From all places in which we have met, or might
meet.
'Far away! — onward — upward!'
A smile strange and sweet
As the incense that rises from some sacred cup
And mixes with music, stole forth, and breathed up
Her whole face, with those words.
'Wheresoever it be,
'May all gentlest angels attend you!' sigh'd he,
'And bear my heart's blessing wherever you are!'
And her hand, with emotion, he kiss'd.

IX.

From afar
That kiss was, alas! by Matilda beheld
With far other emotions: her young bosom swell'd,
And her young cheek with anger was crimson'd.
The Duke
Adroitly attracted towards it her look
By a faint but significant smile.

X.

Much ill-construed,
Renown'd Bishop Berkeley has fully, for one,
strew'd
With arguments page upon page to teach folks
That the world they inhabit is only a hoax.
But it surely is hard, since we can't do without
them,
That our senses should make us so oft wish to
doubt them!

CANTO III.

I.

WHEN first the red savage call'd Man, strode a king,
Thro' the wilds of creation — the very first thing
That his naked intelligence taught him to feel
Was the shame of himself; and the wish to conceal
Was his first step in art. From the apron which Eve
In Eden sat down out of fig-leaves to weave,
To the furbelow'd flounce and the broad crinoline
Of my lady . . . you all know of course whom mean . . .
This art of concealment has greatly increas'd.
A whole world lies cryptic in each human breast;
And that drama of passions as old as the hills,
Which the moral of all men in each man fulfils,
Is only reveal'd now and then to our eyes
In the newspaper-files and the courts of assize.

II.

In the group seen so lately in sunlight assembled
'Mid those walks over which the laburnum-bough trembled,
And the deep-bosom'd lilac, emparadising
The haunts where the blackbird and thrush flit and sing,
The keenest eye could but have seen, and seen only,
A circle of friends, minded not to leave lonely
The bird on the bough, or the bee on the blossom
Conversing at ease in the garden's green bosom,

Like those who, when Florence was yet in her
glories,
Cheated death and kill'd time with Boccaccian
stories.

But at length the long twilight more deeply grew
shaded,
And the fair night the rosy horizon invaded.
And the bee in the blossom, the bird on the bough,
Through the unfooted garden were slumbering
now.
The trees only, o'er every unvisited walk,
Began on a sudden to whisper and talk.
And, as each little sprightly and garrulous leaf
Woke up with an evident sense of relief,
They all seem'd to be saying . . . 'Once more we're
alone,
'And, thank Heaven, those tiresome people are
gone!'

III.

Through the deep blue concave of the luminous air,
Large, loving, and languid, the stars here and there,
Like the eyes of shy passionate women, look'd
down
O'er the dim world whose sole tender light was
their own,
When Matilda, alone, from her chamber descended,
And enter'd the garden, unseen, unattended.
Her forehead was aching and parch'd, and her
breast
By a vague inexpressible sadness oppress'd:
A sadness which led her, she scarcely knew how,
And she scarcely knew why . . . (save, indeed, that
just now
The house, out of which with a gasp she had fled
Half-stifled, seem'd ready to sink on her head) . . .
Out into the night air, the silence, the bright
Boundless starlight, the cool isolation of night!

Her husband that day had look'd once in her face
And press'd both her hands in a silent embrace,
And reproachfully noticed her recent dejection
With a smile of kind wonder and tacit affection.
He, of late so indifferent and listless! . . . at last
Was he startled and aw'd by the change which had pass'd
O'er the once radiant face of his young wife? Whence came
That long look of solicitous fondness? . . . the same
Look and language of quiet affection — the look
And the language, alas! which so often she took
For pure love in the simple repose of its purity —
Her own heart thus lull'd to a fatal security!
Ha! would he deceive her again by this kindness?
Had she been, then, O fool! in her innocent blindness
The sport of transparent illusions? ah folly!
And that feeling, so tranquil, so happy, so holy,
She had taken, till then, in the heart, not alone
Of her husband, but also, indeed, in her own,
For true love, nothing else, after all, did it prove
But a friendship profanely familiar?
'And love? . . .
'What was love, then? . . . not calm, not secure — scarcely kind!
'But in one, all intensest emotions combined:
'Life and death: pain and rapture: the infinite sense
'Of something immortal, unknown, and immense?
Thus, doubting her way, through the dark, the unknown,
The immeasurable, did she wander alone,
With the hush of night's infinite silence outspread
O'er the height of night's infinite heavens over head.
There, silently crossing, recrossing the night
With faint, meteoric, miraculous light,
The swift-shooting stars through the infinite burn'd,

And into the infinite ever return'd.
And, contemplating thus in herself the unknown,
O'er the heart of Matilda there darted and shone
Thoughts, enkindling like meteors the deeps, to expire
Not without leaving traces behind them in fire.

IV.

All absorb'd in the thoughts which fatigued her, a prey
To emotions restrain'd through the wearisome day,
The young wife, released, for a moment, from all
The day's busy-eyed and inquisitive thrall,
Instead of rejoining the others, no doubt
By this time in the salon assembled, stole out
Unobserved to the garden.
There, wandering at will,
She soon found herself, all alone, 'neath that still
And impalpable bower of lilacs, in which
The dark air with odours hung heavy and rich,
Like a soul that grows faint with desire.
'T was the place
In which she so lately had sat, face to face
With her husband, — and her, the pale stranger detested,
Whose presence her heart like a plague had infested.
The whole spot with evil remembrance was haunted.
Through the darkness there rose on the heart which it daunted
Each dreary detail of that desolate day,
So full, and yet so incomplete. Far away
The acacias were muttering, like mischievous elves,
The whole story over again to themselves,
Each word, — and each word was a wound! By degrees
Her memory mingled its voice with the trees,

And the long-streaming sigh of the night-wind among them
Sounded like the reproach which her own heart had flung them.

V.

Ὦ πότνια, πότνια Νὺξ! All who grieve
With life's frustrate desire must, at moments, perceive,
Struggling under the infinite pressure of things,
The repining, imprison'd, and passionate wings
Of a restless, but ruin'd and impotent angel,
Searching, ever in vain, his own penal evangel.
He strikes with his shoulders the sides of the world;
He wails o'er the unwearied sea; and floats furl'd
In the sullen career of the storm; and again
His purpose dissolves, like a passion, in rain,
And relentfully, sighingly, wastes itself out.
A rainbow, a sunbeam, suffices to rout,
And refute, and perplex him. But most, when thy shade,
Sweet Spirit of Night, over all things is laid,
With a wistful self-pity, he peers through the bars
Of his penthouse, and watches his once native stars.
He seems to be touch'd at the heart with a sense
Of his own uncompanion'd, remote, and intense
Isolation; and fearfully feels where he may
For communion with man. Then his voice seems to say:
—'O child of a race by my ruin o'erthrown!
'O heart, bound to mine by a sorrow unknown.
'Upon me the Universe heavily lies,
'And I suffer! I suffer!'
And man's heart replies:
I suffer! I suffer!'

VI.

Perchance (who can tell?)
Such a voice thro' the silence, the darkness, then fell
Like the whisper Eve heard, o'er Matilda's distraught
Troubled fancy, forever suggesting the thought
Of that right which man's heart, as its ultimate right
To resist man's injustice, appears to invite, —
The right of reprisals.
An image uncertain,
And vague, dimly shaped itself forth on the curtain
Of the darkness around her. It came, and it went;
Through her senses a faint sense of peril it sent:
It pass'd and repass'd her; it went and it came
Forever returning; forever the same:
And forever more clearly defined; till her eyes
In that outline obscure could at last recognize
The man to whose image, the more and the more
That her heart, now arous'd from its calm sleep of yore,
From her husband detach'd itself slowly, with pain,
Her thoughts had return'd, and return'd to, again,
As though by some secret indefinite law, —
The vigilant Frenchman — Eugène de Luvois!

VII.

A light sound behind her. She trembled. By some
Night-witchcraft, her vision a fact had become.
On a sudden she felt, without turning to view,
That a man was approaching behind her. She knew

By the fluttering pulse which she could not restrain,
And the quick-beating heart, that this man was Eugène.
Her first instinct was flight; but she felt her slight foot
As heavy as though to the soil it had root.
And the Duke's voice retain'd her, like fear in a dream.

VIII.

'Ah, lady! in life there are meetings which seem
'Like a fate. Dare I think like a sympathy too?
'Yet what else can I bless for this vision of you?
'Alone with my thoughts, on this star-lighted lawn,
'By an instinct resistless, I felt myself drawn
'To revisit the memories left in the place
'Where so lately this evening I look'd in your face.
'And I find, — you, yourself — my own dream!
'Can there be
'In this world one thought common to you and to me?
'If so, . . . I, who deem'd but a moment ago
'My heart uncompanion'd, save only by woe,
'Should indeed be more bless'd than I dare to believe —
'— Ah, but *one* word, but one from your lips to receive' . . .

Interrupting him quickly, she murmur'd, 'I sought,
'Here, a moment of solitude, silence, and thought,
'Which I needed.' . . .
'Lives solitude only for one?
'Must its charm by my presence so soon be undone?
'Ah, cannot two share it? What needs it for this? —
The same thought in both hearts, — be it sorrow or bliss!

'If my heart be the reflex of yours, lady — you,
'Are you not yet alone, — even though we be two?'

For that,' . . . said Matilda, . . . 'needs were you
should read
'What I have in my heart' . .

'Think you, lady, indeed,
'You are yet of that age when a women conceals
'In her heart so completely whatever she feels
'From the heart of the man whom it interests to
know
'And find out what that feeling may be? Ah, not
so,
'Lady Alfred! Forgive me that in it I look,
'But I read in your heart as I read in a book.'

'Well, Duke! and what read you within it? unless
'It be, of a truth, a profound weariness,
'And some sadness?'
'No doubt. To all facts there are laws.
'The effect has its cause, and I mount to the
cause.'

IX.

Matilda shrank back; for she suddenly found
That a finger was press'd on the yet bleeding
wound
She, herself, had but that day perceived in her
breast.

'You are sad,' . . . said the Duke (and that finger
yet press'd
With a cruel persistence the wound it made
bleed) —
'You are sad, Lady Alfred, because the first need
'Of a young and a beautiful woman is to be
'Beloved and to love. You are sad: for you see

'That you are not beloved, as you deem'd that you
were:
'You are sad: for that knowledge hath left you
aware
'That you have not yet loved, though you thought
that you had.
'Yes, yes . . . you are sad — because knowledge
is sad!'

He could not have read more profoundly her heart
'What gave you,' she cried, with a terrified start,
'Such strange power?' . . .
'To read in your thoughts?' he exclaim'd,
'O lady, — a love, deep, profound — be it blamed
'Or rejected, — a love, true, intense — such, at
least,
'As you, and you only, could wake in my breast!'

'Hush, hush! . . . I beseech you . . . for pity!'
she gasp'd,
Snatching hurriedly from him the hand he had
clasp'd
In her effort instinctive to fly from the spot.

For pity?' . . . he echoed, . . . 'for pity! and
what
'Is the pity you owe him? his pity for you!
'He, — the lord of a life, fresh as new-fallen dew!
'The guardian and guide of a woman, young, fair,
'And matchless! (whose happiness did he not
swear
'To cherish through life?) he neglects her — for
whom?
'For a fairer than she? No! the rose in the
bloom
'Of that beauty which, even when hidd'n, can
prevail
'To keep sleepless with song the aroused night-
ingale,

'Is not fairer; for even in the pure world of flowers
'Her symbol is not, and this poor world of ours
'Has no second Matilda! For whom? Let that pass!
''T is not I, 't is not you, that can name her, alas!
'And *I* dare not question or judge her. But why,
'Why cherish the cause of your own misery?
'Why think of one, lady, who thinks not of you?
'Why be bound by a chain which himself he breaks through?
'And why, since you have but to stretch forth your hand,
'The love which you need and deserve to command,
'Why shrink? Why repel it?'

'O hush, sir! O hush!'
Cried Matilda, as though her whole heart were one blush.
'Cease, cease, I conjure you, to trouble my life!
'Is not Alfred your friend? and am I not his wife?'

X.

'And have I not, lady,' he answer'd, . . . 'respected
'*His* rights as a friend, till himself he neglected
'*Your* rights as a wife? Do you think 't is alone
'For three days I have loved you? My love may have grown
'I admit, day by day, since I first felt your eyes,
'In watching their tears, and in sounding your sighs.
'But, O lady! I loved you before I believed
'That your eyes ever wept, or your heart ever grieved.
'Then, I deem'd you were happy — I deem'd you possess'd

'All the love you deserved, — and I hid in my
breast
'My own love, till this hour — when I could not
but feel
'Your grief gave me the right my own grief to
reveal!
'I knew, years ago, of the singular power
'Which Lucile o'er your husband possess'd. Till
the hour
'In which he reveal'd it himself, did I, — say! —
'By a word, or a look, such a secret betray?
'No! no! do me justice. I never have spoken
'Of this poor heart of mine, till all ties he had
broken
'Which bound *your* heart to him. And now —
now, that his love
'For another hath left your own heart free to
rove,
'What is it, — even now, — that I kneel to implore
you?
'Only this, Lady Alfred! . . . to let me adore you
'Unblamed: to have confidence in me: to spend
'On me not one thought, save to think me your
friend.
'Let me speak to you, — ah, let me speak to you
still!
'Hush to silence my words in your heart, if you
will.
'I ask no response: I ask only your leave
'To live yet in your life, and to grieve when you
grieve!'

XI.

'Leave me, leave me!' . . . she gasp'd, with a voice
thick and low
From emotion. 'For pity's sake, Duke, let me go!
'I feel that to blame we should both of us be,
'Did I linger.'
'To blame? yes, no doubt!' . . . answer'd he,

'If the love of your husband, in bringing you peace,
'Had forbidden you hope. But he signs your release
'By the hand of another. One moment! but one!
'Who knows when, alas! I may see you alone
'As to-night I have seen you? or when we may meet
'As to-night we have met? when, entranced at your feet,
'As in this blessed hour, I may ever avow
'The thoughts which are pining for utterance now?'

'Duke! Duke!'... she exclaim'd... 'for Heaven's sake let me go!
'It is late. In the house they will miss me, I know.
'We must not be seen here together. The night
'Is advancing. I feel overwhelm'd with affright!
'It is time to return to my lord.'
'To your lord?'
He repeated, with lingering reproach on the word,
'To your lord? do you think he awaits you, in truth?
'Is he anxiously missing your presence, forsooth?
'Return to your lord!... his restraint to renew?
'And hinder the glances which are not for you?
'No, no!... at this moment his looks seek the face
'Of another! another is there in your place!
'Another consoles him! another receives
'The soft speech which from silence your absence relieves!'

XII.

'You mistake, sir!' responded a voice, calm, severe,
And sad,... 'You mistake, sir! that other is here.'

Eugène and Matilda both started.
'Lucile!'
With a half-stifled scream, as she felt herself reel
From the place where she stood, cried Matilda.
'Ho, oh!
'What! eaves-dropping, madam?' . . . the Duke
cried . . . 'And so
'You were listening?'
'Say, rather,' she said, 'that I heard,
'Without wishing to hear it, that infamous word,—
'Heard — and therefore reply.'
'Belle Comtesse,' said the Duke,
With concentrated wrath in the savage rebuke,
Which betray'd that he felt himself baffled . . . 'you
know
'That your place is not *here*.'
'Duke,' she answer'd him slow,
'My place is wherever my duty is clear;
'And therefore my place, at this moment, is here.
'O lady, this morning my place was beside
'Your husband, because (as she said this she
sigh'd)
'I felt that from folly fast growing to crime —
'The crime of self-blindness — Heaven yet spared
me time
'To save for the love of an innocent wife
'All that such love deserved in the heart and the
life
'Of the man to whose heart and whose life you
alone
'Can with safety confide the pure trust of your
own.'

She turn'd to Matilda, and lightly laid on her
Her soft, quiet hand . . .
''T is, O lady, the honour
'Which that man has confided to you, that, in spite
'Of his friend, I now trust I may yet save to-
night —

'Save for both of you, lady! for yours I revere;
'Duc de Luvois, what say you? — my place is not
here?'

XIII.

And, so saying, the hand of Matilda she caught,
Wound one arm round her waist unresisted, and
sought
Gently, softly, to draw her away from the spot.

The Duke stood confounded, and follow'd them not.

But not yet the house had they reach'd when Lu-
cile
Her tender and delicate burden could feel
Sink and falter beside her. Oh, then she knelt
down,
Flung her arms round Matilda, and press'd to her
own
The poor bosom beating against her.
The moon,
Bright, breathless, and buoyant, and brimful of
June,
Floated up from the hill-hide, sloped over the vale,
And poised herself loose in mid-heaven, with one
pale,
Minute, scintillescent, and tremulous star
Swinging under her globe like a wizard-lit car,
Thus to each of those women revealing the face
Of the other. Each bore on her features the trace
Of a vivid emotion. A deep inward shame
The cheek of Matilda had flooded with flame.
With her enthusiastic emotion, Lucile
Trembled visibly yet; for she could not but feel
That a heavenly hand was upon her that night,
And it touch'd her pure brow to a heavenly light.

'In the name of your husband, dear lady,' she
said;

'In the name of your mother, take heart! Lift
your head,
'For those blushes are noble. (Alas! do not trust
'To that maxim of virtue made ashes and dust,
'That the fault of the husband can cancel the
wife's.)
'Take heart!' and take refuge and strength in your
life's
'Pure silence, — there, kneel, pray, and hope,
weep, and wait!'
'Saved, Lucile!' sobb'd Matilda, 'but saved to
what fate?
'Tears, prayers, yes! not hopes.'
'Hush!' the sweet voice replied.
'Fool'd away by a fancy, again to your side
'Must your husband return. Doubt not this. And
return,
'For the love you can give, with the love that you
yearn
'To receive, lady. What was it chill'd you both now?
'Not the absence of love, but the ignorance how
'Love is nourish'd by love. Well! henceforth you
will prove
'Your heart worthy of love, — since it knows how
to love.'

XIV.

'What gives you such power over me, that I feel
'Thus drawn to obey you? What are you, Lucile?
Sigh'd Matilda, and lifted her eyes to the face
Of Lucile.
There pass'd suddenly through it the trace
Of deep sadness; and o'er that fair forehead came
down
A shadow which yet was too sweet for a frown.
The pupil of sorrow, perchance' . . . she replied.
'Of sorrow?' Matilda exclaim'd . . . 'O confide
To my heart your affliction. In all you made
known

'I should find some instruction, no doubt, for my own!'

'And I some consolation, no doubt; for the tears
'Of another have not flow'd for me many years.'

It was then that Matilda herself seized the hand
Of Lucile in her own, and uplifted her; and
Thus together they enter'd the house.

XV.

'T was the room
Of Matilda.
The languid and delicate gloom
Of a lamp of pure white alabaster, aloft
From the ceiling suspended, around it slept soft.
The casement oped into the garden. The pale
Cool moonlight streamed through it. One lone nightingale
Sung aloof in the laurels.
And here, side by side,
Hand in hand, the two women sat down undescried,
Save by guardian angels.
As, when, sparkling yet
From the rain, that, with drops that are jewels, leaves wet
The bright head it humbles, a young rose inclines
To some pale lily near it, the fair vision shines
As one flower with two faces, in hush'd, tearful speech,
Like the showery whispers of flowers, each to each
Link'd, and leaning together, so loving, so fair,
So united, yet diverse, the two women there
Look'd, indeed, like two flowers upon one drooping stem.
In the soft light that tenderly rested on them.
All that soul said to soul in that chamber, who knows?
All that heart gain'd from heart?

Leave the lily, the rose,
Undisturb'd with their secret within them. For who
To the heart of the flow'ret can follow the dew?
A night full of stars! O'er the silence, unseen,
The footsteps of sentinel angels, between
The dark land and deep sky were moving. You heard
Pass'd from earth up to heaven the happy watch-word
Which brighten'd the stars as amongst them it fell
From earth's heart, whilst it eased . . . 'All is well!
All is well!'

CANTO IV.

I.

SOLE fountain of song, and sole source of such lays
As Time cannot quench in the dust of his days,
Muse or Spirit, that inspirest, since Nature began
The great epic of Life, the deep drama of Man!
What matter though skilless the lay be, and rude,
Or melodiously moving the pure Doric mood,
If one ray from thy presence, informing his song,
Should descend on the singer, and lift him along?
From the prattle of pedants, the babble of fools,
From the falsehoods and forms of conventional schools,
First and last unappealable arbitress, thou!
Whose throne is no more on the crest-cloven brow
Of Parnassus, where first out of Phocis was roll'd,
From the Heliconiades singing ninefold,
The song which the blind son of Mœon set free,
But deep in the heart of mankind, unto thee,
Mother Nature, that badest me sing what I feel,
And canst feel what I sing, unto thee I appeal!
For the Poets pour wine; and, when 't is new, all decry it,
But, once let it be old, every trifler must try it.
And Polonius, who praises no wine that 's not Massic,
Complains of my verse, that my verse is not classic:
And the erudite ladies who take, now and then,
Tea and toast, with æsthetics, precisely at Ten,
Have avouch'd that my song is not earnest because
Model schools, lodging-houses for paupers, poor laws,

The progress of woman, the great working classes,
All the age is concern'd in, unnoticed it passes.
And Miss Tilburina, who sings, and not badly,
My earlier verses, sighs 'Commonplace sadly!'
Tell them, tell them, my song is as old as 't is new,
And aver that 't is earnest because it is true.
Strip from Fashion the garment she wears: what
remains
But the old human heart, with its joys and its
pains?
The same drama that drew to its hopes and its fears
From the eyes of our fathers both laughter and
tears.
'T was conceived in the heart of the first man on
earth,
By the rivers of Eden when, lone from his birth,
Through the bowers of Paradise wandering forlorn,
He pined for the face of an Eve yet unborn:
It was acted in Egypt, when Pharaoh was king;
It was spoken in Attic, and sung to the string
Of the cithern in Greece; and in Rome, word for
word,
It was utter'd by Horace in accents long heard.
Love and grief, strength and weakness, regret and
desire,
These have breath'd in all ages from every lyre,
The chant of man's heart, with its ceaseless en-
deavour;
As old as the song which the sea sings forever.
Other men, other manners! anon from the North,
With the Hun and the Vandal, unchanged it roll'd
forth.
New in language alone, it was hymn'd to the harp
Harold bore by the Baltic; its music fell sharp
With the sword of the Guiscard; it made Rudel's
weeping
Melodious for Melisanth; still is it keeping
In play the perpetual pulses of passion
In the heart of mankind; and whatever the fashion

Of the garments we wear, 't is the same life they
cover.
When the Greek actor, acting Electra, wept over
The urn of Orestes, the theatre rose
And wept with him. What was there in such fic-
tive woes
To thrill a whole theatre? Ah, 't is his son
That lies dead in the urn he is weeping upon!
'T is no fabled Electra that hangs o'er that urn,
'T is a father that weeps his own child.
Men discern
The man through the mask; the heart moved by
the heart
Owns the pathos of life in the pathos of art.
And the heart is the sole grand republic, in which
All that 's human is equal, the poor and the rich:
The sole indestructible state time can touch
With no change: before Rome, before Carthage,
't was such
As it will be when London and Paris are gone.
Save, indeed, that its citizens (time flowing on)
Thro' the errors and follies of ages improve
The final dominion of absolute love.

If this world be, indeed, as 't was said, but a stage,
The dress only is changed 'twixt the acts of an age.
From the dark tiring-chamber behind straight re-
issue
With new masks the old mummers; the very same
tissue
Of passionate antics that move through the play,
With new parts to fulfil and new phrases to say.
The plot grows more complex, more actors appear,
And the moral perchance glimpses out, there and
here,
More clearly, approaching the ultimate fall
Of the curtain that yet hangs unseen. That is all.

As for you, O Polonius, you vex me but slightly;

But you, Tilburina, your eyes beam so brightly
In despite of their languishing looks, on my word,
That to see you look cross I can scarcely afford.
Yes! the silliest woman that smiles on a bard
Better far than Longinus himself can reward
The appeal to her feelings of which she approves;
And the critics I most care to please are the Loves.

Live the gentle romance! live the page torn asunder
By a light rosy finger with innocent wonder!
Live the tale which Neæra turns over and over
In the rose-colour'd room where she dreams of a lover!
Live the old melodrama of murder and love
Which Jane sobs to see from the box up above!
Hang it! women, I know, are vain, frivolous, false
I know they care more for a riband, a waltz,
A box at the opera, a new *moire antique*,
Than for science, philosophy, ethics, or Greek.
I know they admire, too, a thousand times more
Gardoni, or Mario, or even that bore
Colonel * * *, whom the deuce only knows what they say to,
Than Shakespeare, or Goethe, or Newton, or Plato.
I know they are silly, deceitful, and worse:
Inconceivably spiteful, self-will'd, and perverse;
I know they have weak hearts and obstinate wills;
I know that their logic is not Mr. Mill's;
I know that their conscience, thank Heaven, is not mine:
That they cant about genius, but cannot divine
Its existence, till all the world points with the hand;
That they wear their creed (even the best) second-hand;
That their love 's but a plague which in them doth infuse

Its contagion from clothes or coin — no matter whose.
And I know that the thing they most care for . . . but no!
I'll not say it out loud. Never mind what I know.
But despite of all this, and despite of much more,
I know I would rather, a hundred times o'er,
O Neæra, you exquisite infant, whose duty
Is but to be fair, and whose soul is your beauty,
Have one smile from your eyes, or one kiss from your lips,
One pressure vouchsafed from your fair finger-tips,
Than to wear all the laurels that ever with praise
Impaled human brows — even Dante's brown bays!

Alas, friend! what boots it, a stone at his head
And a brass on his breast, — when a man is once dead?
Ay! were fame the sole guerdon, poor guerdon were then
Theirs who, stripping life bare, stand forth models for men.
The reformer's? — a creed by posterity learnt
A century after its author is burnt!
The poet's? — a laurel that hides the bald brow
It hath blighted! The painter's? — ask Raphael now
Which Madonna's authentic! The statesman's? — a name
For parties to blacken, or boys to declaim!
The soldier's? — three lines on the cold Abbey pavement!
Were this all the life of the wise and the brave meant,
All it ends in, thrice better, Neæra, it were
Unregarded to sport with thine odorous hair,
Untroubled to lie at thy feet in the shade
And be loved, while the roses yet bloom overhead.

Than to sit by the lone hearth, and think the long thought,
A severe, sad, blind schoolmaster, envied for naught
Save the name of John Milton! For all men, indeed,
Who in some choice edition may graciously read,
With fair illustration, and erudite note,
The song which the poet in bitterness wrote,
Beat the poet, and notably beat him, in this —
The joy of the genius is theirs, whilst they miss
The grief of the man: Tasso's song — not his madness!
Dante's dreams — not his waking to exile and sadness!
Milton's music — but not Milton's blindness! . . .
Yet rise,
My Milton, and answer, with those noble eyes
Which the glory of heaven hath blinded to earth!
Say — the life, in the living it, savours of worth:
That the deed, in the doing it, reaches its aim:
That the fact has a value apart from the fame:
That a deeper delight, in the mere labour, pays
Scorn of lesser delights, and laborious days:
And Shakespeare, though all Shakespeare's writings were lost,
And his genius, though never a trace of it cross'd
Posterity's path, not the less would have dwelt
In the isle with Miranda, with Hamlet have felt
All that Hamlet hath utter'd, and haply where, pure
On its death-bed, wrong'd Love lay, have moan'd with the Moor!

II.

When Lord Alfred that night to the salon return'd
He found it deserted. The lamp dimly burn'd
As though half out of humour to find itself there

Forced to light for no purpose a room that was bare.
He sat down by the window alone. Never yet
Did the heavens a lovelier evening beget
Since Latona's bright childbed that bore the new moon!
The dark world lay still, in a sort of sweet swoon,
Wide open to heaven; and the stars on the stream
Were trembling like eyes that are loved on the dream
Of a lover; and all things were glad and at rest
Save the unquiet heart in his own troubled breast.
He endeavour'd to think — an unwonted employment,
Which appear'd to afford him no sort of enjoyment.

III.

'Withdraw into yourself. But, if peace you seek there for,
'Your reception, beforehand, be sure to prepare for,'
Wrote the tutor of Nero; who wrote, be it said,
Better far than he acted — but peace to the dead!
He bled for his pupil: what more could he do?
But Lord Alfred, when into himself he withdrew,
Found all there in disorder. For more than an hour
He sat with his head droop'd like some stubborn flower
Beaten down by the rush of the rain — with such force
Did the thick, gushing thoughts hold upon him the course
Of their sudden descent, rapid, rushing, and dim,
From the cloud that had darken'd the evening for him.
At one moment he rose — rose and open'd the door,

And wistfully look'd down the dark corridor
Toward the room of Matilda. Anon, with the sigh
Of an incomplete purpose, he crept quietly
Back again to his place in a sort of submission
To doubt, and return'd to his former position —
That loose fall of the arms, that dull droop of the face,
And the eye vaguely fix'd on impalpable space.
The dream, which till then had been lulling his life,
As once Circe the winds, had seal'd thought; and his wife
And his home for a time he had quite, like Ulysses,
Forgotten; but now o'er the troubled abysses
Of the spirit within him, æolian, forth leapt
To their freedom new-found, and resistlessly swept
All his heart into tumult, the thoughts which had been
Long pent up in their mystic recesses unseen.

IV.

How long he thus sat there, himself he knew not,
Till he started, as though he were suddenly shot,
To the sound of a voice too familiar to doubt,
Which was making some noise in the passage without.
A sound English voice, with a round English accent,
Which the scared German echoes resentfully back sent;
The complaint of a much disappointed cab-driver
Mingled with it, demanding some ultimate stiver,
Then, the heavy and hurried approach of a boot
Which reveal'd by its sound no diminutive foot:
And the door was flung suddenly open, and on
The threshold Lord Alfred by bachelor John
Was seized in that sort of affectionate rage or
Frenzy of hugs which some stout Ursa Major

On some lean Ursa Minor would doubtless bestow
With a warmth for which only starvation and snow
Could render one grateful. As soon as he could,
Lord Alfred contrived to escape, nor be food
Any more for those somewhat voracious embraces.
Then the two men sat down and scann'd each other's faces;
And Alfred could see that his cousin was taken
With unwonted emotion. The hand that had shaken
His own trembled somewhat. In truth he descried,
At a glance, something wrong.

V.

'What 's the matter?' he cried.
'What have you to tell me?'

COUSIN JOHN.

What! have you not heard

LORD ALFRED.

Heard what?

COUSIN JOHN.

This sad business —

LORD ALFRED.

I? no, not a word.

COUSIN JOHN.

You received my last letter?

LORD ALFRED.

I think so. If not
What then?

COUSIN JOHN.

You have acted upon it?

LORD ALFRED.

On what?

COUSIN JOHN.

The advice that I gave you —

LORD ALFRED.

Advice? — let me see!
You *always* are giving advice, Jack, to me.
About Parliament was it?

COUSIN JOHN.

Hang Parliament: no,
The Bank, the Bank, Alfred!

LORD ALFRED.

What Bank?

COUSIN JOHN.

Heavens! I know
You are careless; — but surely you have not forgotten, —
Or neglected . . . I warn'd you the whole thing was rotten.
You have drawn those deposits at least?

LORD ALFRED.

No. I meant
To have written to-day, but the note shall be sent
To-morrow, however.

COUSIN JOHN.

To-morrow? too late!
Too late! oh, what devil bewitch'd you to wait?

LORD ALFRED.

Mercy save us! you don't mean to say . . .

COUSIN JOHN.

Yes, I do.

LORD ALFRED.

What! Sir Ridley? . . .

COUSIN JOHN.

Smash'd, broken, blown up, bolted too!

LORD ALFRED.

But his own niece? . . . In Heaven's name, Jack . . .

COUSIN JOHN.

Oh, I told you
The old hypocritical scoundrel would . . .

LORD ALFRED.

Hold! you
Surely can't mean we are ruin'd?

COUSIN JOHN.

Sit down!
A fortnight ago a report about town
Made me most apprehensive. Alas, and alas!
I at once wrote and warn'd you. Well, now let that pass.
A run on the Bank about five days ago
Confirm'd my forebodings too terribly, though.
I drove down to the City at once: found the door
Of the Bank closed: the Bank had stopp'd payment at four.
Next morning the failure was known to be fraud:
Warrants out for MacNab; but MacNab was abroad:
Gone — we cannot tell where. I endeavor'd to get
Information: have learn'd nothing certain as yet —
Not even the way that old Ridley was gone:

Or with those securities what he had done:
Or whether they had been already call'd out:
If they are not, their fate is, I fear, past a doubt.
Twenty families ruin'd, they say: what was left, —
Unable to find any clew to the cleft
The old fox ran to earth in, — but join you as fast
As I could, my dear Alfred? *

VI.

He stopp'd here, aghast
At the change in his cousin, the hue of whose face
Had grown livid; and glassy his eyes fix'd on space.
'Courage, courage!' . . . said John, . . . 'bear the blow like a man!'
And he caught the cold hand of Lord Alfred. There ran
Through that hand a quick tremor. 'I bear it,' he said,
'But Matilda? the blow is to her!' And his head
Seem'd forced down as he said it.

COUSIN JOHN.

Matilda? Pooh, pooh!
I half think I know the girl better than you.
She has courage enough — and to spare. She cares less
Than most women for luxury, nonsense, and dress.

LORD ALFRED.

The fault has been mine.

COUSIN JOHN.

Be it yours to repair it
If you did not avert, you may help her to bear it.

* These events, it is needless to say, Mr. Morse,
Took place when Bad News as yet travell'd by horse;
Ere the world, like a cockchafer, buzz'd on a wire,
Or Time was calcined by electrical fire;
Ere a cable went under the hoary Atlantic,
Or the word Telegram drove grammarians frantic.

LORD ALFRED.

I might have averted.

COUSIN JOHN.

Perhaps so. But now
There is clearly no use in considering how,
Or whence, came the mischief. The mischief is here.
Broken shins are not mended by crying — that is clear!
One has but to rub them, and get up again,
And push on — and not think too much of the pain.
And at least it is much that you see that to her
You owe too much to think of yourself. You must stir
And arouse yourself, Alfred, for her sake. Who knows?
Something yet may be saved from this wreck. I suppose
We shall make him disgorge all he can, at the least.

O Jack, I have been a brute idiot! a beast!
'A fool! I have sinn'd, and to *her* I have sinn'd!
'I have been heedless, blind, inexcusably blind!
'And now, in a flash, I see all things!'
As tho'
To shut out the vision, he bow'd his head low
On his hand; and the great tears in silence roll'd on,
And fell momently, heavily, one after one.
John felt no desire to find instant relief
For the trouble he witness'd.
He guess'd, in the grief
Of his cousin, the broken and heart-felt admission
Of some error demanding a heart-felt contrition;
Some oblivion perchance which could plead less excuse

To the heart of a man re-aroused to the use
Of the conscience God gave him, than simply and merely
The neglect for which now he was paying so dearly.
So he rose without speaking, and paced up and down
The long room, much afflicted, indeed, in his own
Cordial heart for Matilda.
Thus, silently lost
In his anxious reflections, he cross'd and recross'd
The place where his cousin yet hopelessly hung
O'er the table; his fingers entwisted among
The rich curls they were knotting and dragging: and there,
That sound of all sounds the most painful to hear,
The sobs of a man! Yet so far in his own
Kindly thoughts was he plunged, he already had grown
Unconscious of Alfred.
And so, for a space
There was silence between them.

VII.

At last, with sad face
He stopp'd short, and bent on his cousin awhile
A pain'd sort of wistful, compassionate smile,
Approach'd him, — stood o'er him, — and suddenly laid
One hand on his shoulder —
'Where is she?' he said.
Alfred lifted his face all disfigured with tears,
And gazed vacantly at him, like one that appears
In some foreign language to hear himself greeted,
Unable to answer.
'Where is she?' repeated
His cousin.
He motion'd his hand to the door;
'There, I think,' he replied. Cousin John said no more,
And appear'd to relapse to his own cogitations,

Of which not a gesture vouchsafed indications.
So again there was silence.
A timepiece at last
Struck the twelve strokes of midnight.
Roused by them, he cast
A half look to the dial; then quietly threw
His arm round the neck of his cousin, and drew
The hands down from his face.
'It is time she should know
'What has happen'd,' he said, . . . 'let us go to her now.'
Alfred started at once to his feet.
Drawn and wan
Though his face, he look'd more than his wont was — a man.
Strong, for once, in his weakness. Uplifted, fill'd through
With a manly resolve.
If that axiom be true
Of the '*Sum quia cogito*,' I must opine
That '*id sum quod cogito*': — that which, in fine,
A man thinks and feels, with his whole force of thought
And feeling, the man is himself.
He had fought
With himself, and rose up from his self-overthrow
The survivor of much which that strife had laid low.
At his feet, as he rose at the name of his wife,
Lay in ruins the brilliant unrealized life
Which, though yet unfulfill'd, seem'd till then, in that name,
To be his, had he claim'd it. The man's dream of fame
And of power fell shatter'd before him; and only
There rested the heart of the woman, so lonely
In all save the love he could give her. The lord
Of that heart he arose. Blush not, Muse, to record
That his first thought, and last, at that moment was not

Of the power and fame that seem'd lost to his lot,
But the love that was left to it; not of the pelf
He had cared for, yet squander'd; and not of himself,
But of her; as he murmur'd,
'One moment, dear Jack!
'We have grown up from boyhood together. Our track
'Has been through the same meadows in childhood: in youth
'Through the same silent gateways, to manhood. In truth,
'There is none that can know me as you do; and none
'To whom I more wish to believe myself known.
'Speak the truth; you are not wont to mince it, I know.
'Nor I, shall I shirk it, or shrink from it now.
'In despite of a wanton behaviour, in spite
'Of vanity, folly, and pride, Jack, which might
'Have turn'd from me many a heart strong and true
'As your own, I have never turn'd round and miss'd YOU
'From my side in one hour of affliction or doubt
'By my own blind and heedless self-will brought about.
'Tell me truth. Do I owe this alone to the sake
'Of those old recollections of boyhood that make
'In your heart yet some clinging and crying appeal
'From a judgment more harsh, which I cannot but feel
'Might have sentenced our friendship to death long ago?
'Or is it . . . (I would I could deem it were so!)
'That, not all overlaid by a listless exterior,
'Your heart has divined in me something superior
To that which I seem; from my innermost nature

'Not wholly expell'd by the world's usurpature?
'Some instinct of earnestness, truth, or desire
'For truth? Some one spark of the soul's native fire
'Moving under the ashes, and cinders, and dust
'Which life hath heap'd o'er it? Some one fact to trust
'And to hope in? Or by you alone am I deem'd
'The mere frivolous fool I so often have seem'd
'To my own self?'

COUSIN JOHN.

No, Alfred! you will, I believe,
Be true, at the last, to what now makes you grieve
For having belied your true nature so long.
Necessity is a stern teacher. Be strong!

'Do you think,' he resumed . . . 'what I feel while I speak
'Is no more than a transient emotion, as weak
'As these weak tears would seem to betoken it?'

COUSIN JOHN.

No!

LORD ALFRED.

Thank you, cousin! your hand then. And now I will go
Alone, Jack. Trust to me.

VIII.

COUSIN JOHN.

I do. But 't is late.
If she sleeps, you 'll not wake her?

LORD ALFRED.

No, no! it will wait
(Poor infant!) too surely, this mission of sorrow;
If she sleeps, I will not mar her dreams of to-
morrow.

He open'd the door, and pass'd out.
Cousin John
Watch'd him, wistful, and left him to seek her
alone.

IX.

His heart beat so loud when he knock'd at her
door,
He could hear no reply from within. Yet once
more
He knock'd lightly. No answer. The handle he
tried:
The door open'd: he enter'd the room undescried.

X.

No brighter than is that dim circlet of light
Which enhaloes the moon when rains form on the
night,
The pale lamp an indistinct radiance shed
Round the chamber, in which at her pure snowy
bed
Matilda was kneeling; so wrapt in deep prayer
That she knew not her husband stood watching her
there.
With the lamplight the moonlight had mingled a
faint
And unearthly effulgence, which seem'd to acquaint
The whole place with a sense of deep peace made
secure
By the presence of something angelic and pure.
And not purer some angel Grief carves o'er the
tomb

Where Love lies, than the lady that kneel'd in that gloom.
She had put off her dress; and she look'd to his eyes
Like a young soul escaped from its earthly disguise:
Her fair neck and innocent shoulders were bare,
And over them rippled her soft golden hair;
Her simple and slender white bodice unlaced
Confined not one curve of her delicate waist.

As the light that, from water reflected, forever
Trembles up thro' the tremulous reeds of a river,
So the beam of her beauty went trembling in him,
Thro' the thoughts it suffused with a sense soft and dim,
Reproducing itself in the broken and bright
Lapse and pulse of a million emotions.
That sight
Bow'd his heart, bow'd his knee. Knowing scarce what he did
To her side through the chamber he silently slid,
And knelt down beside her — and pray'd at her side.

XI.

Upstarting, she then for the first time descried
That her husband was near her; suffused with the blush
Which came o'er her soft pallid cheek with a gush
Where the tears sparkled yet.
As a young fawn uncouches,
Shy with fear, from the fern where some hunter approaches,
She shrank back; he caught her, and circling his arm
Round her waist, on her brow press'd one kiss long and warm.

Then her fear changed in impulse; and hiding her face
On his breast, she hung lock'd in a clinging embrace
With her soft arms wound heavily round him, as though
She fear'd, if their clasp were relax'd, he would go:
Her smooth naked shoulders, uncared for, convulsed
By sob after sob, while her bosom yet pulsed
In its pressure on his, as the effort within it
Lived and died with each tender tumultuous minute.
'O Alfred, O Alfred! forgive me,' she cried —
'Forgive me!'
'Forgive you, my poor child!' he sigh'd
'But I never have blamed you for aught that I know,
'And I have not one thought that reproaches you now.'
From her arms he unwound himself gently. And so
He forced her down softly beside him. Below
The canopy shading their couch, they sat down.
And, he said, clasping firmly her hand in his own,
'When a proud man, Matilda, has found out at length
'That he is but a child in the midst of his strength,
'But a fool in his wisdom, to whom can he own
'The weakness which thus to himself hath been shown?
'From whom seek the strength which his need of is sore,
'Altho' in his pride he might perish, before
'He could plead for the one, or the other avow
''Mid his intimate friends? Wife of mine, tell me now,
'Do you join me in feeling, in that darken'd hour,

'The sole friend that *can* have the right or the power
'To be at his side, is the woman that shares
'His fate, if he falter; the woman that bears
'The name dear for *her* sake, and hallows the life
'She has mingled her own with,—in short, that man's wife?'
'Yes,' murmur'd Matilda, 'O yes!'
'Then,' he cried,
'This chamber in which we two sit, side by side,
(And his arm, as he spoke, seem'd more softly to press her,)
'Is now a confessional—*you*, my confessor!'
'I?' she falter'd, and timidly lifted her head.
'Yes! but first answer one other question,' he said:
'When a woman once feels that she is not alone;
'That the heart of another is warm'd by her own;
'That another feels with her whatever she feel,
'And halves her existence in woe or in weal;
'That a man for her sake will, so long as he lives,
'Live to put forth his strength which the thought of her gives;
'Live to shield her from want, and to share with her sorrow;
'Live to solace the day, and provide for the morrow;
'Will that woman feel less than another, O say,
'The loss of what life, sparing this, takes away?
'Will she feel (feeling this), when calamities come,
'That they brighten the heart, tho' they darken the home?'
She turn'd, like a soft rainy heaven, on him
Eyes that smiled thro' fresh tears, trustful, tender, and dim.
'That woman,' she murmur'd, 'indeed were thrice blest!'
'Then courage, true wife of my heart!' to his breast
As he folded and gather'd her closely, he cried.

'For the refuge, to-night in these arms open'd wide,
To your heart, can be never closed to it again,
'And this room is for both an asylum! For when
'I pass'd thro' that door, at the door I left there
'A calamity, sudden, and heavy to bear.
'One step from that threshold, and daily, I fear,
'We must face it henceforth; but it enters not here.
'For that door shuts it out, and admits here alone
'A heart which calamity leaves all your own!'
She started . . . 'Calamity, Alfred! to you?'
'To both, my poor child, but 't will bring with it too
'The courage, I trust, to subdue it.'
'O speak!
'Speak!' she falter'd in tones timid, anxious, and weak.
'O yet for a moment,' he said, 'hear me on!
'Matilda, this morn we went forth in the sun,
'Like those children of sunshine, the bright summer flies,
'That sport in the sunbeam, and play thro' the skies
'While the skies smile, and heed not each other: at last,
'When their sunbeam is gone, and their sky overcast,
'Who recks in what ruin they fold their wet wings?
'So indeed the morn found us,—poor frivolous things!
'Now our sky is o'ercast, and our sunbeam is set,
'And the night brings its darkness around us. Oh, yet,
'Have we weather'd no storm thro' those twelve cloudless hours?
'Yes; you, too, have wept!
'While the world was yet ours,
'While its sun was upon us, its incense stream'd to us,
'And its myriad voices of joy seem'd to woo us,

'We stray'd from each other, too far, it may be,
'Nor, wantonly wandering, then did I see
'How deep was my need of thee, dearest, how great
'Was thy claim on my heart and thy share in my fate!
'But, Matilda, an angel was near us, meanwhile,
'Watching o'er us, to warn, and to rescue! 'That smile
'Which you saw with suspicion, that presence you eyed
'With resentment, an angel's they were at your side
'And at mine; nor perchance is the day all so far,
'When we both in our prayers, when most heart-felt they are,
'May murmur the name of that woman now gone
'From our sight evermore. 'Here, this evening, alone,
'I seek your forgiveness, in opening my heart
'Unto yours, — from this clasp be it never to part!
'Matilda, the fortune you brought me is gone,
'But a prize richer far than that fortune has won
'It is yours to confer, and I kneel for that prize,
''T is the heart of my wife!' With suffused happy eyes
She sprang from her seat, flung her arms wide apart,
And, tenderly closing them round him, his heart
Clasp'd in one close embrace to her bosom; and there
Droop'd her head on his shoulder; and sobb'd. Not despair,
Not sorrow, not even the sense of her loss,
Flow'd in those happy tears, so oblivious she was
Of all save the sense of her own love! Anon,
However, his words rush'd back to her. 'All gone,
The fortune you brought me!'
And eyes that were dim

With soft tears she upraised: but those tears were for *him*.
'Gone! my husband? she said, 'tell me all! see! I need,
'To sober this rapture, so selfish indeed,
'Fuller sense of affliction.'
'Poor innocent child
He kiss'd her fair forehead, and mournfully smiled.
'Your uncle has fail'd, and we know nothing more.
'There still rest my own smaller means, as before,
'And my heart, and my brain, and my right hand for you;
'And with these, my Matilda, what may I not do?
'You know not, I knew not myself till this hour,
'Which so sternly reveal'd it, my nature's full power.'
'And I too,' she murmur'd, 'I too am no more
'The mere infant at heart you have known me before.
'I have suffer'd since then. I have learn'd much in life.
'O take, with the faith I have pledged as a wife,
'The heart I have learn'd as a woman to feel!
'For I — love you, my husband!'
As though to conceal
Less from him, than herself, what that motion express'd,
She dropp'd her bright head, and hid all on his breast.
'O lovely as woman, belovèd as wife!
'Evening star of my heart, light forever my life!
'If from eyes fix'd too long on this base earth thus far
'You have miss'd your due homage, dear guardian star,
'Believe that, uplifting those eyes unto heaven,
'There I see you, and know you, and bless the light given

'To lead me to life's late achievement; my own,
'My blessing, my treasure, my all things in one!'

XII.

How lovely she look'd in the lovely moonlight,
That stream'd thro' the pane from the blue balmy night!
How lovely she look'd in her own lovely youth,
As she clung to his side, full of trust and of truth!
How lovely to *him*, as he tenderly press'd
Her young head on his bosom, and sadly caress'd
The glittering tresses which, now shaken loose,
Shower'd gold in his hand, as he smooth'd them!

XIII.

O Muse,
Interpose not one pulse of thine own beating heart
'Twixt these two silent souls! There 's a joy beyond art,
And beyond sound the music it makes in the breast.

XIV.

Here were lovers twice wed, that were happy at least!
No music, save such as the nightingales sung,
Breath'd their bridals abroad; and no cresset, uphung,
Lit that festival hour, save what soft light was given
From the pure stars that peopled the deep-purple heaven.
He open'd the casement: he led her with him,
Hush'd in heart, to the terrace, dipp'd cool in the dim
Lustrous gloom of the shadowy laurels. They heard
Aloof the invisible, rapturous bird,
With her wild note bewildering the woodlands: they saw

Not unheard, afar off, the hill-rivulet draw
His long ripple of moon-kindled wavelets with cheer
From the throat of the vale; o'er the dark-sapphire sphere
The mild, multitudinous lights lay asleep,
Pastured free on the midnight, and bright as the sheep
Of Apollo in pastoral Thrace; from unknown
Hollow glooms freshen'd odours around them were blown
Intermittingly; then the moon dropp'd from their sight,
Immersed in the mountains, and put out the light
Which no longer they needed to read on the face
Of each other life's last revelation.
The place
Slept sumptuous round them; and Nature, that never
Sleeps, but waking reposes, with patient endeavour
Continued about them, unheeded, unseen,
Her old, quiet toil in the heart of the green
Summer silence, preparing new buds for new blossoms,
And stealing a finger of change o'er the bosoms
Of the unconscious woodlands; and Time, that halts not
His forces, how lovely soever the spot
Where their march lies — the wary, gray strategist, Time,
With the armies of Life, lay encamp'd — Grief and Crime,
Love and Faith, in the darkness unheeded; maturing,
For his great war with man, new surprises; securing
All outlets, pursuing and pushing his foe
To his last narrow refuge — the grave.

XV.

Sweetly though
Smiled the stars like new hopes out of heaven, and sweetly
Their hearts beat thanksgiving for all things, completely
Confiding in that yet untrodden existence
Over which they were pausing. To-morrow, resistance
And struggle; to-night, Love his hallow'd device
Hung forth, and proclaim'd his serene armistice.

CANTO V.

I.

WHEN Lucile left Matilda, she sat for long hours
Forlorn in her own vacant chamber. Those powers
Of action and thought, the day's sharp exigence
Had maintain'd for a while at a pitch so intense,
Now, when solitude found her, within and without,
Released from the part she had fully play'd out,
Deserted her wholly. Alone, in the gloom,
Mid the signs of departure, that gave to that room
A dull sense of strangeness, — about to turn back
To her old vacant life, on her old homeless track, -
She felt her heart falter within her. She sat
Like some poor player, gazing dejectedly at
The insignia of royalty worn for a night;
Exhausted, fatigued, with the dazzle and light,
And the effort of passionate feigning; who thinks
Of her own meagre, rush-lighted chamber, and
shrinks
From the chill of the change that awaits her.

II.

From these
Oppressive, and comfortless, blank reveries,
Unable to sleep, she descended the stair
That led from her room to the garden.
The air,
With the chill of the dawn, yet unris'n, but at
hand,
Strangely smote on her feverish forehead. The
land
Lay in darkness and change, like a world in its
grave:

No sound, save the voice of the long river wave,
And the crickets that sing all the night!
She stood still,
Vaguely watching the thin cloud that curl'd on the hill.
Emotions, long pent in her breast, were at stir,
And the deeps of the spirit were troubled in her.
Ah, pale woman! what, with that heart-broken look,
Didst thou read then in Nature's weird heart-breaking book?
Have the wild rains of heaven a father? and who
Hath in pity begotten the drops of the dew?
Orion, Arcturus, who pilots them both?
What leads forth in his season the bright Mazzaroth?
Hath the darkness a dwelling,—save there, in those eyes?
And what name hath that half-reveal'd hope in the skies?
Ay, question, and listen! What answer?
The sound
Of the long river wave through its stone-troubled bound,
And the crickets that sing all the night.
There are hours
Which belong to unknown, supernatural powers,
Whose sudden and solemn suggestions are all
That to this race of worms,—stinging creatures, that crawl,
Lie, and fear, and die daily, beneath their own stings,—
Can excuse the blind boast of inherited wings.
When the soul, on the impulse of anguish, hath pass'd
Beyond anguish, and risen into rapture at last;
When she traverses nature and space, till she stands

In the Chamber of Fate; where, through tremulous hands,
Hum the threads from an old-fashion'd distaff uncurl'd,
And those three blind old women sit spinning the world.

III.

The dark was blanch'd wan, overhead. One green star
Was slipping from sight in the pale void afar;
The spirits of change, and of awe, with faint breath,
Were shifting the midnight, above and beneath.
The spirits of awe and of change were around,
And about, and upon her.
A dull muffled sound,
And a hand on her hand, like a ghostly surprise,
And she felt herself fix'd by the hot, hollow eyes
Of the Frenchman before her: those eyes seem'd to burn,
And scorch out the darkness between them, and turn
Into fire as they fix'd her. He look'd like the shade
Of a creature by fancy from solitude made,
And sent forth by the darkness to scare and oppress
Some soul of a monk in a waste wilderness.

IV.

'At last, then — at last, and alone, — I and thou,
'Lucile de Nevers, have we met?
'Hush! I know
'Not for me was the tryst. Never mind! it is mine;
'And whatever led hither those proud steps of thine,
'They remove not, until we have spoken. My hour

'Is come; and it holds thee and me in its power,
'As the darkness holds both the horizons. 'T is well!
'The timidest maiden that e'er to the spell
'Of her first lover's vows listen'd, hush'd with delight,
When soft stars were brightly uphanging the night,
'Never listen'd, I swear, more unquestioningly,
Than thy fate hath compell'd thee to listen to me!'
To the sound of his voice, as though out of a dream,
She appear'd with a start to awaken.
The stream,
When he ceased, took the night with its moaning again,
Like the voices of spirits departing in pain.
'Continue,' she answer'd, 'I listen to hear.'
For a moment he did not reply.
Through the drear
And dim light between them, she saw that his face
Was disturb'd. To and fro he continued to pace,
With his arms folded close, and the low, restless stride
Of a panther, in circles around her, first wide,
Then narrower, nearer, and quicker. At last
He stood still, and one long look upon her he cast.
'Lucile, dost thou dare to look into my face?
'Is the sight so repugnant? ha, well! Canst thou trace
'One word of thy writing in this wicked scroll,
'With thine own name scrawl'd thro' it, defacing a soul?'
In his face there was something so wrathful and wild,
That she could not but shudder.
He saw it, and smiled,
And then turn'd him from her, renewing again

That short, restless stride; as though searching in vain
For the point of some purpose within him.
'Lucile,
'You shudder to look in my face: do you feel
'No reproach when you look in your own heart?'
'No, Duke,
'In my conscience I do not deserve your rebuke:
'Not yours!' she replied.
'No,' he mutter'd again,
'Gentle justice! you first bid Life hope not, and then
'To Despair you say "Act not!"'

V.

He watch'd her awhile
With a chill sort of restless and suffering smile.
They stood by the wall of the garden. The skies,
Dark, sombre, were troubled with vague prophecies
Of the dawn yet far distant. The moon had long set,
And all in a glimmering light, pale, and wet
With the night-dews, the white roses sullenly loom'd
Round about her. She spoke not. At length he resumed.
'Wretched creatures we are! I and thou — one and all!
'Only able to injure each other, and fall
Soon or late, in that void which ourselves we prepare
For the souls that we boast of! weak insects we are!
O heaven! and what has become of them? all
Those instincts of Eden surviving the Fall:
That glorious faith in inherited things:
That sense in the soul of the length of her wings!

'Gone! all gone! and the wail of the night-wind sounds human,
'Bewailing those once nightly visitants! Woman,
'Woman, what hast thou done with my youth? Give again,
'Give me back the young heart that I gave thee ... in vain!'
'Duke!' she falter'd.
'Yes, yes!' he went on, 'I was not
'Always thus! what I once was I have not forgot.'

VI.

As the wind that heaps sand in a desert, there stirr'd
Through his voice an emotion that swept every word
Into one angry wail; as, with feverish change,
He continued his monologue, fitful and strange.
'I remember the time!—for it haunts me even yet
'Like a ghost, through the Hades of lifelong regret—
'I remember the time when the spirits of June
'Led the faint-footed dance of the flowers to the tune
'That was sung by the sons of the morning of old,
'When the sun first came forth from his chambers of gold.
'Then I saw round the rosy horizon of things
'The omnipotent Hours, in Olympian rings.
'Charioteering in glory; the world seem'd to glow
'Where they circled and swept, each a crown on his brow!
'Then the gods in the twilight descended, and then
'The yet homely Immortals abided with men,
'Then the oak flow'd with heaven-colour'd honey, and the lymph
'Was the dwelling divine of a white-footed nymph:
'Then all men were bold, and all women were fair;

'And Love, — a light impulse alive on the air,
'Flitted, folded for aye in his own happy dream,
'Flitted here, flitted there, like a bee on a beam,
'Wherever new flow'rets, by lawn or by dell,
'Held on tiptoe for him their divine œnomel!
'I remember the time, for my spirit was stirr'd,
'When afar off the voice of the turtle was heard,
'"Arise! come away!" I arose. O despair!
'Led by what lying star, through what verdurous snare,
'By what pathway dissembling in falsehood so sweet
'A peril so fatal to me, did we meet?
'Oh, could I not take up the parable too,
'As it fell from your lips, with a scorn all as true?
'Woe to him, in whose nature, once kindled, the torch
'Of Passion burns downward to blacken and scorch!
'Woe to him that hath kiss'd and caroused cheek by jowl
'With the harlot Corruption, and drain'd her wild bowl!
'But shame, shame, and sorrow, O woman, to thee,
'Whose hand sow'd the first seed of destruction in me!
'Whose lip taught the first lesson of falsehood to mine!
'Whose looks first made me doubt lies that look'd so divine!
'My soul by thy beauty was slain in its sleep:
And if tears I mistrust, 't is that thou too canst weep!
'Well! . . . how utter soever it be, one mistake
'In the love of a man, what more change need it make
'In the steps of his soul through the course love began,
'Than all other mistakes in the life of a man?

'And I said to myself, "I am young yet: too young
'To have wholly survived my own portion among
'The great needs of man's life, or exhausted its joys;
'What is broken? one only of youth's pleasant toys!
'Shall I be the less welcome, wherever I go,
'For one passion survived? No! the roses will blow
'As of yore, as of yore will the nightingales sing,
'Not less sweetly for one blossom cancell'd from Spring!
'Hast thou loved, O my heart? to thy love yet remains
'All the wide loving-kindness of nature. The plains
'And the hills with each summer their verdure renew:
'Wouldst thou be as they are? do thou then as they do.
'Let the dead sleep in peace. Would the living divine
'Where they slumber? Let only new flowers be the sign!

'Since the bird of the wood flits and sings round the nest
'Where lie broken the eggs she once warm'd with her breast;
'Since the flower of the field, newly born yesterday,
'When to-morrow a new bud hath burst on the spray,
'Folds, and falls in the night, unrepining, unseen;
'Since aloof in the forests, when forests are green,
'You may hear through the silence the dead wood that cracks.

'Since man, where his course throughout nature
he tracks,
'In all things one science to soothe him may find,
'To walk on, and look forward, and never be-
hind,
'— What to me, O my heart, is thy joy or thy
sorrow?
'What the tears of to-day or the sneers of to-
morrow?
'What is life? what is death? what the false?
what the true?
'And what is the harm that one woman can do?"

'Vain! all vain! . . . For when, laughing, the wine
I would quaff,
'I remember'd too well all it cost me to laugh.
Through the revel it was but the old song I heard,
'Through the crowd the old footsteps behind me
they stirr'd,
'In the night-wind, the starlight, the murmurs of
even,
'In the ardours of earth, and the languors of
heaven,
'I could trace nothing more, nothing more through
the spheres,
'But the sound of old sobs, and the tracks of old
tears!
'It was with me the night long in dreaming or
waking,
'It abided in loathing, when daylight was break-
ing,
'The burthen of the bitterness in me! Behold
'All my days were become as a tale that is told.
'And I said to my sight, "No good thing shalt
thou see,
For the noonday is turnèd to darkness in me.
'In the house of Oblivion my bed I have made."
'And I said to the grave, "Lo, my father!" and
said

'To the worm, "Lo, my sister!" The dust to the dust,
'And one end to the wicked shall be with the just!'

VII.

He ceased, as a wind that wails out on the night,
And moans itself mute. Through the indistinct light
A voice, clear, and tender, and pure, with a tone
Of ineffable pity replied to his own.
'And say you, and deem you, that I wreck'd your life?
'Alas! Duc de Luvois, had I been your wife
'By a fraud of the heart which could yield you alone
'For the love in your nature a lie in my own,
'Should I not, in deceiving, have injured you worse?
'Yes, I then should have merited justly your curse,
'For I then should have wrong'd you!'
'Wrong'd! ah, is it so?
'You could never have loved me?'
'Duke!'
'Never? oh no!'
(He broke into a fierce angry laugh, as he said)
'Yet, lady, you knew that I loved you: you led
'My love on to lay to its heart, hour by hour,
'All the pale, cruel, beautiful, passionless power
'Shut up in that cold face of yours! was this well?
'But enough! not on you would I vent the wild hell
'Which has grown in my heart. Oh that man, first and last
'He tramples in triumph my life! he has cast
'His shadow 'twixt me and the sun . . . let it pass
'My hate yet may find him!'
She murmur'd, 'Alas
'These words, at least, spare me the pain of reply

'Enough, Duc de Luvois! farewell. I shall try
To forget every word I have heard, every sight
'That has grieved and appall'd me in this wretched night
'Which must witness our final farewell. May you, Duke,
'Never know greater cause your own heart to rebuke
'Than mine thus to wrong and afflict you have had!
'Adieu!'
'Stay, Lucile, stay!' . . . he groan'd,
. . . 'I am mad,
'Brutalized, blind with pain! I know not what I said.
'I meant it not. But' (he moan'd, drooping his head)
'I suffer, and pain is perchance all unjust;
''T is the worm trodden down that yet stings in the dust.
'Forgive me! I — have I so wrong'd you, Lucile?
'I . . . have I . . . forgive me, forgive me!'
'I feel
'Only sad, very sad to the soul,' she said, 'far,
'Far too sad for resentment.'
'Yet stand as you are
'One moment,' he murmur'd. 'I think, could I gaze
'Thus awhile on your face, the old innocent days
'Would come back upon me, and this scorching heart
'Free itself in hot tears. Do not, do not depart
'Thus, Lucile! stay one moment. I know why you shrink,
'Why you shudder; I read in your face what you think.
Do not speak to me of it. And yet, if you will,
'Whatever you say, my own lips shall be still.
Do not fear I should justify aught I have done

'I feel I have sinn'd. Yet this night you have won
'A great battle from me. Teach, O teach me to bear
'The defeat I have merited! Teach my despair
'Some retributive penance to purge this foul past
'And work out life's penal redemption at last!
'Only speak!'
'Could I help you,' she murmur'd, 'my heart
'Would bless Heaven indeed if before we thus part
'I could rescue from out the wild work of this night
'One holier memory, one gleam of light
'Out of this hour of darkness! But what can I say?
'This deep sense of pity seems utterless!'
'Nay,
'I have suffer'd,' he answer'd, 'but yet do not think
'That, whatever my fate, I have shrunk, or do shrink.
'When the peasant, at nightfall, regaining the door
'Of his hut, finds the tempest hath been there before;
'That the thunder hath wasted the harvest he sow'd,
'And the lightning to ashes consumed his abode;
'The wild fact to his senses one moment may seem
Like a haggard, confused, and unnatural dream:
The vast night is sombre all round him; the earth
'Smoulders lurid and angry; he stands on his hearth
'And looks round for the welcome of old, and the place
'Where his wife used to sit with the smile on her face;

'A heap of red ashes lies strewn on the heath.
'But in darkness of night, and with silence of death,
'He sits down, and already reflects on the morrow.
'So I, in the night of my life, with my sorrow!
'Ah! but henceforth in vain shall I till that wild field.
'It is blasted: no harvest these furrows will yield.
'True! my life hath brought forth only evil, and there
'The wild wind hath planted the wild weed: yet ere
'You exclaim, "Fling the weed to the flames," think again
'Why the field is so barren. With all other men
'First love, though it perish from life, only goes
'Like the primrose that falls to make way for the rose.
'For a man, at least most men, may love on through life:
'Love in fame; love in knowledge; in work: earth is rife
'With labour, and therefore with love, for a man.
'If one love fails, another succeeds, and the plan
'Of man's life includes love in all objects! But I?
'All such loves from my life through its whole destiny
'Fate excluded. The love that I gave you, alas!
'Was the sole love that life gave to me. Let that pass!
'It perish'd, and all perish'd with it. Ambition?
'Wealth left nothing to add to my social condition.
'Fame? But fame in itself presupposes some great
'Field wherein to pursue and attain it. The State?
'I, to cringe to an upstart? The Camp? I, to draw
'From its sheath the old sword of the Dukes of Luvois
'To defend usurpation? Books, then? Science, Art?

'But, alas! I was fashion'd for action: my heart,
'Wither'd thing though it be, I should hardly compress
'Twixt the leaves of a treatise on Statics: life's stress
'Needs scope, not contraction! what rests? to wear out
'At some dark northern court an existence, no doubt,
'In wretched and paltry intrigues for a cause
'As hopeless as is my own life! By the laws
'Of a fate I can neither control nor dispute,
'I am what I am!'

VIII.

For a while she was mute.
Then she answer'd, 'We are our own fates. Our own deeds
'Are our doomsmen. Man's life was made not for men's creeds,
'But men's actions. And, Duc de Luvois, I might say
'That all life attests, that "the will makes the way."
'I might say, in a world full of lips that lack bread
'And of souls that lack light, there are mouths to be fed,
'There are wounds to be heal'd, there is work to be done,
'And life can withhold love and duty from none.
'Is the land of our birth less the land of our birth,
'Or its claim the less strong, or its cause the less worth
'Our upholding, because the white lily no more
Is as sacred as all that it bloom'd for of yore?
Yet be that as it may be; I cannot perchance
Judge this matter. I am but a woman, and France
Has for me simpler duties. Large hope, though, Eugène

De Luvois, should be yours. There is purpose in pain,
'Otherwise it were devilish. I trust in my soul
'That the great master hand which sweeps over the whole
'Of this deep harp of life, if at moments it stretch
'To shrill tension some one wailing nerve, means to fetch
'Its response the truest, most stringent, and smart,
Its pathos the purest, from out the wrung heart,
Whose faculties, flaccid, it may be, if less
'Sharply strung, sharply smitten, had fail'd to express
'Just the one note the great final harmony needs.
'And what best proves there 's life in a heart ? — that it bleeds!
'Grant a cause to remove, grant an end to attain,
'Grant both to be just, and what mercy in pain !
'Cease the sin with the sorrow ! See morning begin !
'Pain must burn itself out if not fuell'd by sin.
'There is hope in yon hill-tops, and love in yon light.
'Let hate and despondency die with the night!'

He was moved by her words. As some poor wretch confined
In cells loud with meaningless laughter, whose mind
Wanders trackless amidst its own ruins, may hear
A voice heard long since, silenced many a year,
And now, 'mid mad ravings recaptured again,
Singing thro' the caged lattice a once well-known strain,
Which brings back his boyhood upon it, until
The mind's ruin'd crevices graciously fill
With music and memory, and, as it were,
The long-troubled spirit grows slowly aware
Of the mockery round it, and shrinks from each thing

It once sought, — the poor idiot who pass'd for a king,
Hard by, with his squalid straw crown, now confess'd
A madman more painfully mad than the rest, —
So the sound of her voice, as it there wander'd o'er
His echoing heart, seem'd in part to restore
The forces of thought: he recaptured the whole
Of his life by the light which, in passing, her soul
Reflected on his: he appear'd to awake
From a dream, and perceived he had dream'd a mistake:
His spirit was soften'd, yet troubled in him:
He felt his lips falter, his eyesight grow dim.
But he murmur'd . . .
'Lucile, not for me that sun's light
'Which reveals — not restores — the wild havoc of night.
'There are some creatures born for the night, not the day.
'Broken-hearted the nightingale hides in the spray,
'And the owl's moody mind in his own hollow tower
'Dwells muffled. Be darkness henceforward my dower.
'Light, be sure, in that darkness there dwells, by which eyes
'Grown familiar with ruins may yet recognize
'Enough desolation.'
'Take comfort,' she said,
'Above all, — that in mercy, this night, I was led
'To save you, in saving another! Oh yet,
'Thank Heaven that you have not quite barter'd regret
'For remorse, nor the sad self-redemptions of grief
'For a self-retribution beyond all relief!'

IX.

'Retribution!' he falter'd. 'Ah, that work begins

'Could you see but the process! Whatever my sins,
'I will live on myself to avenge them, Lucile.
'And if aught on this darkness now gleams, 't is the steel
'That executes judgment. My own hand lays bare
'The axe that awaits me!'
'Alas, Duke, beware!
'There is a remorse which is sin crowning sin.
'There is a humility which is akin
'To the pride of perdition. The pride that claims here
'On earth to itself (howsoever severe
'To itself it may be) God's dread office and right
'Of punishing sin, is a sin in Heaven's sight,
'And against Heaven's service. Leave Heaven's work to Heaven!
'Let us pray, not indeed to be judged, but forgiven;
'Pray for pardon, not penance. Eugène de Luvois
'Leave the judgment to Him who alone knows the law.
'Surely no man can be his own judge, least of all
'His own executioner. Man's pride must fall
'When it stands up in judgment. Then kneel Eugène, kneel,
'And hope, kneeling and praying!' she murmur'd.
'Lucile,'
He exclaim'd, and unconsciously sank on his knees,
Overawed by her look.
Then, by solemn degrees,
There crept on the midnight within him a cold
Keen gleam of spiritual light. Fold by fold,
The films of his self-gather'd blindness, in part
Were breath'd bare, and the dawn shudder'd into his heart.
She was silent. At length he look'd upward, and saw

That sad serene countenance, mournful as law
And tender as pity, bow'd o'er him: and heard
In some thicket the matinal chirp of a bird.
The dawn, and the dews of the dawn! . . . To his eyes,
Tears, he felt them, youth's long lost familiars, arise!

X.

'O Lucile! my predestined, inscrutable fate!
'Thou hast forced me to weep, but the tears flow too late.
'Why, I know not! they cannot extinguish the fire
'That consumes me. Leave, leave me the scorn and the ire
'Which are all that can yet give me strength to resign
'Those gentler emotions which might have been mine.'

XI.

'Scorn and Ire are but shadows that stand at the gate
'Of the Heavenly Land,' she replied. 'Scorn and hate
'Have no life in themselves. They are devil-born things —
''T is our cowardice only that gives to them stings.
'They may scare the rash fool, but they cannot dismay
'The hero predestin'd to conquer his way.
'From the eye that hath courage to look in their face
'They shrink into darkness, and leave not a trace
'On the soul, save the sense of a solemn thanks-giving
'For the danger subdued, and the strength found in striving,
'When she enters the calm that is conquer'd from strife.

'Self-conscious, and sings in the sabbath of life!
'Vulgar natures alone suffer vainly.
'Eugène
'De Luvois, in this life we have met once again,
'And once more life parts us. Yon dayspring for me
'Lifts the veil of a future in which it may be
'We shall meet never more. Grant, oh grant to me yet
'The belief that it is not in vain we have met!
'I plead for the future. A new horoscope
'I would cast: will you read it? I plead for a hope:
'I plead for a memory; yours, yours alone,
'To restore or to spare. Let the hope be your own,
'Be the memory mine.
'Once of yore, when for man
'Faith yet lived, ere this age of the sluggard began,
'Men, aroused to the knowledge of evil, fled far
'From the fading rose-gardens of sense, to the war
'With the Pagan, the cave in the desert, and sought
'Not repose, but employment in action or thought,
'Life's strong earnest, in all things! oh think not of me,
'But yourself! for I plead for your own destiny:
'I plead for your life, with its duties undone,
'With its claims unappeased, and its trophies unwon;
'And in pleading for life's fair fulfilment, I plead
'For all that you miss, and for all that you need.'

XII.

Thro' the calm crystal air, faint and far, as she spoke,
A clear chilly chime from a church-turret broke;

And the sound of her voice, with the sound of the bell
On his ear, where he kneel'd, softly, soothingly fell.
All within him was wild and confused, as within
A chamber deserted in some roadside inn,
Where, passing, wild travellers paused, overnight,
To quaff and carouse; in its socket each light
Is extinct; crash'd the glasses, and scrawl'd is the wall
With wild, ribald ballads: serenely o'er all,
For the first time perceived, where the dawn-light creeps faint
Thro' the wrecks of that orgy, the face of a saint
Seen thro' some broken frame appears noting meanwhile
The ruin all round with a sorrowful smile.
And he gazed round. The curtains of Darkness half drawn
Oped behind her; and pure as the pure light of dawn
She stood, bathed in morning, and seem'd to his eyes
From their sight to be melting away in the skies
That expanded around her.

XIII.

There pass'd thro' his head
A fancy — a vision. That woman was dead
He had loved long ago — loved and lost! dead to him,
Dead to all the life left him; but there, in the dim
Dewy light of the dawn, stood a spirit; 't was hers;
And he said to the soul of Lucile de Nevers,
'O soul, to its sources departing away!
'Pray for mine, if one soul for another may pray.
'I to ask have no right, thou to give hast no power,
One hope to my heart. But in this parting hour

'I name not my heart, and I speak not to thine.
Answer, soul of Lucile, to this dark soul of mine,
'Does not soul owe to soul, what to heart heart denies,
'Hope, when hope is salvation? Behold, in yon skies,
This wild night is passing away while I speak:
Lo, above us, the dayspring beginning to break!
'Something wakens within me, and warms to the beam.
'Is it hope that awakens? or do I but dream?
'I know not. It may be, perchance, the first spark
'Of a new light within me to solace the dark
'Unto which I return; or perchance it may be
'The last spark of fires half extinguish'd in me.
'I know not. Thou goest thy way: I my own:
'For good or for evil, I know not. Alone
'This I know: my heart softens. The ghosts of old years
'Seem appeased for a moment. Just now I shed tears;
'And for those tears I thank thee. I should have sinn'd less,
'Suffer'd less, if I could have wept more. I would bless
'(I whose heart sought to curse thee!) — would bless thee, Lucile.
'But what were my curse, or my blessing? I feel
'This alone; we are parting. I wish'd to say more,
'But no matter! 't will pass. All between us is o'er.
'Forget the wild words of to-night. 'T was the pain
'For long years hoarded up, that rush'd from me again.
'I was unjust: forgive me. Spare now to reprove
'Other words, other deeds. It was madness, not love,

'That you thwarted this night. What is done is now done.
'Death remains to avenge it, or life to atone.
'I was madden'd, delirious! I saw you return
'To him — not to me; and I felt my heart burn
'With a fierce thirst for vengeance — and thus . . . let it pass!
'Long thoughts these, and so brief the moments, alas!
'Thou goest thy way, and I mine. I suppose
''Tis to meet never more. Is it not so? Who knows,
'Or who heeds, where the exile from Paradise flies?
'Or what altars of his in the desert may rise?
'Is it not so, Lucile? Well, well! Thus then we part
'Once again, soul from soul, as before heart from heart!'

XIV.

And again, clearer far than the chime of the bell,
That voice on his sense softly, soothingly fell.
'Our two paths must part us, Eugène; for my own
'Seems no more through that world in which henceforth alone
'You must work out (as now I believe that you will)
'The hope which you speak of. That work I shall still
(If I live) watch and welcome, and bless far away.
'Doubt not this. But mistake not the thought, if I say,
'That the great mortal combat between human life
'And each human soul must be single. The strife
'None can share, tho' by all its results may be known.

'When the soul arms for battle, she goes forth alone.
'I say not, indeed, we shall meet never more,
'For I know not. But meet, as we have met of yore,
'I know that we cannot. Perchance we may meet
'By the death-bed, the tomb, in the crowd, in the street,
'Or in solitude even, but never again
'Shall we meet from henceforth as we have met, Eugène.
'For we know not the way we are going, nor yet
'Where our two ways may meet, or may cross. Life hath set
'No landmarks before us. But this, this alone,
'I will promise: whatever your path, or my own,
'If, for once in the conflict before you, it chance
'That the Dragon prevail, and with cleft shield, and lance
'Lost or shatter'd, borne down by the stress of the war,
'You falter and hesitate, if from afar
'I, still watching (unknown to yourself, it may be)
'O'er the conflict to which I conjure you, should see
'That my presence could rescue, support you, or guide,
'In the hour of that need I shall be at your side,
'To warn, if you will, or incite, or control;
'And again, once again, we shall meet, soul to soul!'

XV.

The voice ceased.
He uplifted his eyes.
All alone
He stood on the bare edge of dawn. She was gone,

Like a star, when up bay after bay of the night,
Ripples in, wave on wave, the broad ocean of light.
And at once, in her place, was the Sunrise! It rose
In its sumptuous splendour and solemn repose,
The supreme revelation of light. Domes of gold,
Realms of rose, in the Orient! And breathless, and bold,
While the great gates of heaven roll'd back one by one,
The bright herald angel stood stern in the sun!
Thrice holy Eospheros! Light's reign began
In the heaven, on the earth, in the heart of the man.
The dawn on the mountains! the dawn everywhere!
Light! silence! the fresh renovations of air!
O earth, and O ether! A butterfly breeze
Floated up, flutter'd down, and poised blithe on the trees.
Through the revelling woods, o'er the sharp rippled stream,
Up the vale slow uncoiling itself out of dream,
Around the brown meadows, adown the hill slope,
The spirits of morning were whispering '*Hope*!'

XVI.

He uplifted his eyes. In the place where she stood
But a moment before, and where now roll'd the flood
Of the sunrise all golden, he seem'd to behold,
In the young light of sunrise, an image unfold
Of his own golden youth. Such a youth as that night
He had painted it to her. There rose on his sight
A vision of knightly forefathers, of fame,
Of ancestral ambition; and France by the name

Of his sires seem'd to call him. There, hover'd in light
That image aloft, o'er the shapeless and bright
And Aurorean clouds, which themselves seem'd to be
Brilliant fragments of that golden world, wherein he
Had once dwelt, a native!
There, rooted and bound
To the earth, stood the man, gazing at it! Around
The rims of the sunrise it hover'd and shone
Transcendent, that type of a youth that was gone;
And he — as the body may yearn for the soul,
So he yearn'd to embody that image. His whole
Heart arose to regain it.
'And is it too late?'
No! for Time is a fiction, and limits not fate.
Thought alone is eternal. Time thralls it in vain.
For the thought that springs upward and yearns to regain
The pure source of spirit, there *is* no TOO LATE.
As the stream to its first mountain levels, elate
In the fountain arises, the spirit in him
Arose to that image. The image waned dim
Into heaven; and heavenward with it, to melt
As it melted, in day's broad expansion, he felt
With a thrill, sweet and strange, and intense — awed, amazed —
Something soar and ascend in his soul, as he gazed.

CANTO VI.

I.

MAN is born on a battle-field. Round him, to rend
Or resist, the dread Powers he displaces attend,
By the cradle which Nature, amidst the stern shocks
That have shatter'd creation, and shapen it, rocks.
He leaps with a wail into being; and lo!
His own mother, fierce Nature herself, is his foe.
Her whirlwinds are roused into wrath o'er his head:
'Neath his feet roll her earthquakes: her solitudes spread
To daunt him: her forces dispute his command:
Her snows fall to freeze him: her suns burn to brand:
Her seas yawn to ingulf him: her rocks rise to crush:
And the lion and leopard, allied, lurk to rush
On their startled Invader.
In lone Malabar,
Where the infinite forest spreads breathless and far,
'Mid the cruel of eye and the stealthy of claw
(Striped and spotted destroyers!) he sees, pale with awe,
On the menacing edge of a fiery sky
Grim Doorga, blue-limb'd and red-handed, go by,
And the first thing he worships is Terror.
Anon,
Still impell'd by Necessity hungrily on,
He conquers the realms of his own self-reliance,
And the last cry of fear wakes the first of defiance.
From the serpent he crushes its poisonous soul·

Smitten down in his path see the dead lion roll!
On toward Heaven the son of Alcmena strides high on
The heads of the Hydra, the spoils of the lion:
And man, conquering Terror, is worshipp'd by man.

A camp has this world been since first it began!
From his tents sweeps the roving Arabian; at peace,
A mere wandering shepherd that follows the fleece;
But, warring his way thro' a world's destinies,
Lo from Delhi, from Bagdadt, from Cordova, rise
Domes of empiry, dower'd with science and art,
Schools, libraries, forums, the palace, the mart!

New realms to man's soul have been conquer'd. But those,
Forthwith they are peopled for man by new foes!
The stars keep their secrets, the earth hides her own,
And bold must the man be that braves the Unknown!
Not a truth has to art or to science been given,
But brows have ached for it, and souls toil'd and striven;
And many have striven, and many have fail'd,
And many died, slain by the truth they assail'd.
But when Man hath tamed Nature, asserted his place
And dominion, behold! he is brought face to face
With a new foe — himself! War is open'd within
His own heart: for self-knowledge is knowledge of sin.
And many have striven, and many in vain,
With the still rebel heart, and the still baffled brain; —
Some have conquer'd, some died of that conquest, but all

Have suffer'd, all struggled; and, whether he fall
Or whether he vanquish, still man, on the field
Of life's lasting war, may not rest on his shield,
May not lean on his spear, till the armèd Archangel
Sound o'er him the trump of earth's final evangel.

Now 't is Thought attacks Thought. And the dread battle-plain
Of that war is the soul, now, herself. And again
The Immortals take part in the battle; and Heaven
And Hell to the conflict their counsels have given.
See! stern Torquemada dooms Thought to expire!
Hark! the psalm of the martyr soars upward in fire!
Then the auto-da-fés are extinguish'd: back roll
Dense volumes of darkness: and, sovran, the soul
Chants her pæan, proclaiming to Earth Heaven's freedom.
And who is it that comes with dyed garments from Edom?
His foot in the blood of the winepress is wet,
And that foot on the head of the serpent is set!

Oh were naught gain'd beside from this conflict of Thought,
Man, at least, in alliance with man hath been brought.
The wide world owns no longer one master alone,
And no more every nation is vassal to one.
Now the strong need the weak, and the weak aid the strong;
Gracious laws whereby Peace may her lifetime prolong
Have been wrought out of wrath by the swords of mankind,
And the shout of free nations rolls forth on the wind.
May the sword then be sheath'd? may the banner be furl'd?

And is Peace crown'd forever, fair Queen of the
World?
Nay, Peace holds the sword to establish her state,
And the sentinel walks by the white temple-gate,
Lest the Lion, by night, to the Leopard should say,
'Arise, Brother Leopard, and forth on the prey!'
Still the watchfire must burn, still the watchman
must wake,
And still Force arm to keep what still Force arms
to take.

What is worth living for is worth dying for too.
And therefore all honour, brave hearts! unto you
Who have fallen, that Freedom, more fair by your
death,
A pilgrim, may walk where your blood on her
path
Leads her steps to your graves!
Let them babble above you!
Sleep well! where no breath of detraction may
move you,
And the peace the world gives not is yours at the
last!
Chiefly you, sons of England, whose life-blood hath
past
Into England's own being! or whether your names,
'Mid the shrines of her kings, the pale tablet pro-
claims;
Or, recorded alone in some fond widow'd heart,
Amidst Spain's arid vines, vex'd no more by the
dart
Of the suns of the south, or on wide Waterloo,
You now slumber; or where the chill Baltic rolls
blue;
Or the crocus of Asia may brighten your bed;
Or 'mid halls in the Orient, where latest you bled,
Where Horror still hears, up the pale marble floor,
Thro' curtains twice crimson'd, the drip of your
gore.

You, sons of one mother, who boast from your birth
Of our England's fair name 'mid the nations of earth,
You who — 'midst the gray castles the swords of our sires
Have left us to fight for; the pastoral spires
Where we breathed our first prayers; and our green lanes, so green!
Where spring is thrice spring, and each maiden a queen —
Love these things with a love that is threefold, because
There a man may, unvex'd by iniquitous laws,
Say the thing that he thinks, do the thing that he needs:
There Thought may find freedom for all honest creeds;
There Opinion may circle from soul on to soul;
And Enterprise broadly embrace either pole;
Forget not whose blood with its sanction hath seal'd
This, our boast, upon many a far foughten field.
What is worth living for is worth dying for too.
Forget not the Dead who died for us!
And you
Whom this song cannot reach with its transient breath,
Deaf ears that are stopp'd with the brown dust of death,
Blind eyes that are dark to your own deathless glory,
Silenced hearts that are heedless to praise murmur'd o'er ye,
Sleep deep! sleep in peace! sleep in memory ever!
Wrapt, each soul in the deeds of its deathless endeavour,
Till that great Final Peace shall be struck through the world;
Till the stars be recall'd, and the firmament furl'd

In the dawn of a daylight undying ; until
The signal of Sion be seen on the Hill
Of the Lord ; when the day of the battle is done,
And the conflict with Time by Eternity won !

Till then, while the ages roll onward, thro' war,
Toil, and strife, must roll with them this turbulent star.
And man can no more exclude War, than he can
Exclude Sorrow ; for both are conditions of man,
And agents of God. Truth's supreme revelations
Come in sorrow to men, and in war come to nations.
Then blow, blow the clarion ! and let the war roll !
And strike steel upon steel, and strike soul upon soul,
If, in striking, we kindle keen flashes and bright
From the manhood in man, stricken thus into light.

II.

Silence straightway, stern Muse, the soft cymbals of pleasure,
Be all bronzen these numbers, and martial the measure !
Breathe, sonorously breathe, o'er the spirit in me
One strain, sad and stern, of that deep Epopee
Which thou, from the fashionless cloud of far time,
Chantest lonely, when Victory, pale, and sublime
In the light of the aureole over her head,
Hears, and heeds not the wound in her heart fresh and red.
Blown wide by the blare of the clarion, unfold
The shrill clanging curtains of war !
And behold
A vision !
The antique Heraclean seats ;
And the long Black Sea billow that once bore those fleets,
Which said to the winds, ' Be ye, too, Genoese ! '

And the red, angry sands of the chafed Chersonese;
And the two foes of man, War and Winter, allied
Round the Armies of England and France, side by side
Enduring and dying (Gaul and Britain abreast!)
Where the towers of the North fret the skies of the East.

III.

Since that sunrise, which rose thro' the calm linden stems
O'er Lucile and Eugène, in the garden at Ems,
Thro' twenty-five seasons encircling the sun,
This planet of ours on its pathway hath gone,
And the fates that I sing of have flow'd with the fates
Of a world, in the red wake of war, round the gates
Of that doom'd and heroical city, in which
(Fire crowning the rampart, blood bathing the ditch!)
At bay, fights the Russian as some hunted bear,
Whom the huntsmen have hemm'd round at last in his lair.

IV.

A fang'd, arid plain, sapp'd with underground fire,
Soak'd with snow, torn with shot, mash'd to one gory mire!
There Fate's iron scale hangs in horrid suspense,
While those two famish'd ogres — the Siege, the Defence,
Face to face, thro' a vapour frore, dismal, and dun,
Glare, scenting the breath of each other.
The one
Double-bodied, two-headed — by separate ways
Winding, serpentwise, nearer; the other, each day's

Sullen toil adding size to, — concentrated, solid,
Indefatigable — the brass-fronted, embodied,
And audible *αυτος* gone sombrely forth
To the world from that Autocrat Will of the north

V.

In the dawns of a moody October, a pale,
Ghostly, motionless vapour began to prevail
Over city and camp; like that garment of death
Which takes form from the face it conceals.
'T was the breath
War, yet drowsily yawning, began to suspire;
Whereathro', here and there, flash'd an eye of red fire,
And closed, from some rampart beginning to bellow
Its hoarse challenge; answer'd anon, thro' the yellow
And sulphurous twilight: till day reel'd and rock'd,
And roar'd into dark. Then the midnight was mock'd
With fierce apparitions. Ring'd round by a rain
Of red fire, and of iron, the murtherous plain
Flared with fitful combustion; where frequently fell
Afar off the fatal, disgorged *scharpenelle*,
And fired the horizon, and singed the coil'd gloom
With wings of swift flame round that City of Doom.

VI.

So the day — so the night! So by night, so by day,
With stern, patient pathos, while time wears away,
In the trench flooded thro', in the wind where it wails,
In the snow where it falls, in the fire where it hails

Shot and shell — link by link, out of hardship and pain,
Toil, sickness, endurance, is forged the bronze chain
Of those terrible siege-lines!
No change to that toil
Save the mine's sudden leap from the treacherous soil,
Save the midnight attack, save the groans of the maim'd,
And Death's daily obolus due, whether claim'd
By man or by nature.

VII.

Time passes. The dumb
Bitter, snow-bound, and sullen November is come
And its snows have been bathed in the blood of the brave:
And many a young heart has glutted the grave:
And on Inkerman yet the wild bramble is gory,
And those bleak heights henceforth shall be famous in story.

VIII.

The moon, swath'd in storm, has long set: thro' the camp
No sound save the sentinel's slow sullen tramp,
The distant explosion, the wild sleety wind,
That seems searching for something it never can find.
The midnight is turning: the lamp is nigh spent:
And, wounded and lone, in a desolate tent
Lies a young British officer who . . .
In this place,
However, my Muse is compell'd to retrace
Her precipitous steps and revert to the past.
The shock which had suddenly shatter'd at last
Alfred Vargrave's fantastical holiday nature
Had sharply drawn forth to his full size and stature

The real man, conceal'd till that moment beneath
All he yet had appear'd. From the gay broider'd sheath
Which a man in his wrath flings aside, even so
Leaps the keen trenchant steel summon'd forth by a blow.
And thus loss of fortune gave value to life.
The wife gain'd a husband, the husband a wife,
In that home which, tho' humbled and narrow'd by fate,
Was enlarged and ennobled by love. Low their state,
But large their possessions.
Sir Ridley, forgiven
By those he unwittingly brought nearer heaven
By one fraudulent act, than through all his sleek speech
The hypocrite brought his own soul, safe from reach
Of the law, died abroad.
Cousin John, heart and hand,
Purse and person, henceforth (honest man!) took his stand
By Matilda and Alfred; guest, guardian, and friend
Of the home he both shared and assured, to the end,
With his large lively love. Alfred Vargrave meanwhile
Faced the world's frown, consoled by his wife's faithful smile.
Late in life, he began life in earnest; and still,
With the tranquil exertion of resolute will,
Thro' long, and laborious, and difficult days,
Out of manifold failure, by wearisome ways,
Work'd his way through the world; till at last he began,
(Reconciled to the work which mankind claims from man)

After years of unwitness'd, unwearied endeavour,
Years impassion'd yet patient, to realize ever
More clear on the broad stream of current opinion
The reflex of powers in himself — that dominion
Which the life of one man, if his life be a truth,
May assert o'er the life of mankind. Thus, his youth
In his manhood renew'd, fame and fortune he won
Working only for home, love, and duty.
One son
Matilda had borne him; but scarce had the boy,
With all Eton yet fresh in his full heart's frank joy,
The darling of young soldier comrades, just glanced
Down the glad dawn of manhood at life, when it chanced
That a blight sharp and sudden was breath'd o'er the bloom
Of his joyous and generous years, and the gloom
Of a grief premature on their fair promise fell:
No light cloud like those which, for June to dispel,
Captious April engenders; but deep as his own
Deep nature. Meanwhile, ere I fully make known
The cause of this sorrow, I track the event,
When first a wild war-note thro' England was sent,
He, transferring without either token, or word,
To friend, parent, or comrade, a yet virgin sword,
From a holiday troop, to one bound for the war,
Had march'd forth, with eyes that saw death in the star
Whence others sought glory. Thus, fighting, he fell
On the red field of Inkerman; found, who can tell
By what miracle, breathing, tho' shatter'd, and borne

To the rear by his comrades, pierced, bleeding, and torn.
Where for long days and nights, with the wound in his side,
He lay, dark.

IX.

But a wound deeper far, undescried,
In the young heart was rankling: for there, of a truth,
In the first earnest faith of a pure pensive youth,
A love large as life, deep and changeless as death,
I ay ensheathed: and that love, ever fretting its sheath,
The frail scabbard of life pierced and wore thro' and thro'.
There are loves in man's life for which time can renew
All that time may destroy. Lives there are, tho', in love,
Which cling to one faith, and die with it; nor move,
Tho' earthquakes may shatter the shrine.
Whence or how
Love laid claim to this young life, it matters not now.

X.

Oh is it a phantom? a dream of the night?
A vision which fever hath fashion'd to sight?
The wind, wailing ever, with motion uncertain
Sways sighingly there the drench'd tent's tatter'd curtain,
To and fro, up and down.
But it is not the wind
That is lifting it now: and it is not the mind
That hath moulded that vision.
A pale woman enters,
As wan as the lamp's waning light, which concentres

Its dull glare upon her. With eyes dim and dimmer
There, all in a slumbrous and shadowy glimmer,
The sufferer sees that still form floating on,
And feels faintly aware that he is not alone.
She is flitting before him. She pauses. She stands
By his bedside, all silent. She lays her white hands
On the brow of the boy. A light finger is pressing
Softly, softly, the sore wounds: the hot blood-stain'd dressing
Slips from them. A comforting quietude steals
Thro' the rack'd weary frame: and, throughout it, he feels
The slow sense of a merciful, mild neighbourhood.
Something smoothes the toss'd pillow. Beneath a gray hood
Of rough serge, two intense tender eyes are bent o'er him,
And thrill thro' and thro' him. The sweet form before him,
It is surely Death's angel Life's last vigil keeping!
A soft voice says . . . 'Sleep!'
And he sleeps: he is sleeping.

XI.

He waked before dawn. Still the vision is there:
Still that pale woman moves not. A minist'ring care
Meanwhile has been silently changing and cheering
The aspect of all things around him.
Revering
Some power unknown and benignant, he bless'd
In silence the sense of salvation. And rest
Having loosen'd the mind's tangled meshes, he faintly
Sigh'd . . . 'Say what thou art, blessèd dream of a saintly
'And minist'ring spirit!'

A whisper serene
Slid, softer than silence . . . 'The Sœur Seraphine,
'A poor Sister of Charity. Shun to inquire
'Aught further, young soldier. The son of thy sire,
'For the sake of that sire, I reclaim from the grave.
'Thou didst not shun death: shun not life. 'T is more brave
'To live, than to die. Sleep!'
He sleeps: he is sleeping.

XII.

He waken'd again, when the dawn was just steeping
The skies with chill splendour. And there, never flitting,
Never flitting, that vision of mercy was sitting.
As the dawn to the darkness, so life seem'd returning
Slowly, feebly within him. The night-lamp, yet burning,
Made ghastly the glimmering daybreak.
He said,
'If thou be of the living, and not of the dead,
'Sweet minister, pour out yet further the healing
'Of that balmy voice; if it may be, revealing
'Thy mission of mercy! whence art thou?'
'O son
'Of Matilda and Alfred, it matters not! One
'Who is not of the living nor yet of the dead:
'To thee, and to others, alive yet' . . . she said . .
'So long as there liveth the poor gift in me
'Of this ministration: to them, and to thee,
'Dead in all things beside. A French Nun, whose vocation
'Is now by this bedside. A nun hath no nation
'Wherever man suffers, or woman may soothe,
'There her land! there her kindred!'
She bent down to smooth

The hot pillow and added . . . 'Yet more than another
'Is thy life dear to me. For thy father, thy mother,
'I knew them — I know them.'
'Oh can it be? you
'My dearest dear father! my mother! you knew,
'You know them?'
She bow'd, half averting, her head
In silence.
He brokenly, timidly said,
'Do they know I am thus?'
'Hush!' . . . she smiled, as she drew
From her bosom two letters: and — can it be true?
That beloved and familiar writing!
He burst
Into tears . . . 'My poor mother — my father! the worst
'Will have reach'd them!'
'No, no!' she exclaim'd with a smile,
'They know you are living; they know that meanwhile
'I am watching beside you. Young soldier, weep not!'
But still on the nun's nursing bosom, the hot
Fever'd brow of the boy weeping wildly is press'd.
There, at last, the young heart sobs itself into rest:
And he hears, as it were between smiling and weeping,
The calm voice say . . . 'Sleep!'
And he sleeps, he is sleeping.

XIII.

And day follow'd day. And, as wave follows wave,
With the tide, day by day, life, re-issuing, drave
Thro' that young hardy frame novel currents of health.
Yet some strange obstruction, which life's self by stealth

Seem'd to cherish, impeded life's progress. And still
A feebleness, less of the frame than the will.
Clung about the sick man: hid and harbour'd within
The sad hollow eyes: pinch'd the cheek pale and thin:
And clothed the wan fingers with languor.
And there,
Day by day, night by night, unremitting in care,
Unwearied in watching, so cheerful of mien,
And so gentle of hand, sat the Sœur Seraphine!

XIV.

A strange woman truly! not young; yet her face,
Wan and worn as it was, bore about it the trace
Of a beauty which time could not ruin. For the whole
Quiet cheek, youth's lost bloom left transparent, the soul
Seem'd to fill with its own light, like some sunny fountain
Everlastingly fed from far off in the mountain
That pours, in a garden deserted, its streams,
And all the more lovely for loneliness seems.
So that, watching that face, you would scarce pause to guess
The years which its calm careworn lines might express,
Feeling only what suffering with these must have past
To have perfected there so much sweetness at last

XV.

Thus, one bronzen evening, when day had put out
His brief thrifty fires, and the wind was about,
The nun, watchful still by the boy, on his own
Laid a firm, quiet hand, and the deep tender tone
Of her voice moved the silence.

She said . . . 'I have heal'd
'These wounds of the body. Why hast thou conceal'd,
'Young soldier, that yet open wound in the heart?
'Wilt thou trust *no* hand near it?'
He winced, with a start,
As of one that is suddenly touch'd on the spot
From which every nerve derives suffering.
'What?
'Lies my heart, then, so bare?' he moan'd bitterly.
'Nay,'
With compassionate accents she hasten'd to say,
'Do you think that these eyes are with sorrow, young man,
'So all unfamiliar, indeed, as to scan
'Her features, yet know them not?
'Oh, was it spoken,
'"*Go ye forth, heal the sick, lift the low, bind the broken!*"
'Of the body alone? Is our mission, then, done,
'When we leave the bruised heart, if we bind the bruised bone?
'Nay, is not the mission of mercy twofold?
'Whence twofold, perchance, are the powers, that we hold
'To fulfil it, of Heaven! For Heaven doth still
'To us, Sisters, it may be, who seek it, send skill
'Won from long intercourse with affliction, and art
'Help'd of Heaven, to bind up the broken of heart.
'Trust to me!' (His two feeble hands in her own
She drew gently.) 'Trust to me!' (she said, with soft tone):
'I am not so dead in remembrance to all
'I have died to in this world, but what I recall
'Enough of its sorrow, enough of its trial,
'To grieve for both — save from both haply! The dial
Receives many shades, and each points to the sun

'The shadows are many, the sunlight is one.
'Life's sorrows still fluctuate: God's love does not.
'And His love is unchanged, when it changes our lot.
'Looking up to this light, which is common to all,
'And down to these shadows, on each side, that fall
'In Time's silent circle, so various for each,
'Is it nothing to know that they never can reach
'So far, but what light lies beyond them forever?
'Trust to me! Oh, if in this hour I endeavour
'To trace the shade creeping across the young life
'Which, in prayer till this hour, I have watch'd through its strife
'With the shadow of death, 't is with this faith alone,
'That, in tracing the shade, I shall find out the sun.
'Trust to me!'
She paused: he was weeping. Small need
Of added appeal, or entreaty, indeed,
Had those gentle accents to win from his pale
And parch'd, trembling lips, as it rose, the brief tale
Of a life's early sorrow. The story is old,
And in words few as may be shall straightway be told.

XVI.

A few years ago, ere the fair form of Peace
Was driven from Europe, a young girl — the niece
Of a French noble, leaving an old Norman pile
By the wild northern seas, came to dwell for a while
With a lady allied to her race — an old dame
Of a threefold legitimate virtue, and name,
In the Faubourg Saint Germain.
Upon that fair child,
From childhood, nor father nor mother had smiled.
One uncle their place in her life had supplied,

And their place in her heart: she had grown at his side,
And under his roof-tree, and in his regard,
From childhood to girlhood.
This fair orphan ward
Seem'd the sole human creature that lived in the heart
Of that stern, rigid man, or whose smile could impart
One ray of response to the eyes which, above
Her fair infant forehead, look'd down with a love
That seem'd almost stern, so intense was its chill
Lofty stillness, like sunlight on some lonely hill
Which is colder and stiller than sunlight elsewhere.

Grass grew in the courtyard; the chambers were bare
In that ancient mansion; when first the stern tread
Of its owner awaken'd their echoes long dead:
Bringing with him this infant (the child of a brother),
Whom, dying, the hands of a desolate mother
Had placed on his bosom. 'T was said — right or wrong —
That, in the lone mansion, left tenantless long,
To which, as a stranger, its lord now return'd,
In years yet recall'd, through loud midnights had burn'd
The light of wild orgies. Be that false or true,
Slow and sad was the footstep which now wander'd through
Those desolate chambers; and calm and severe
Was the life of their inmate.
Men now saw appear
Every morn at the mass that firm, sorrowful face,
Which seem'd to lock up in a cold iron case
Tears harden'd to crystal. Yet harsh if he were,
His severity seem'd to be trebly severe
In the rule of his own rigid life, which, at least,

Was benignant to others. The poor parish priest,
Who lived on his largess, his piety praised.
The peasant was fed, and the chapel was raised,
And the cottage was built, by his liberal hand.
Yet he seem'd in the midst of his good deeds to stand
A lone, and unloved, and unlovable man.
There appear'd some inscrutable flaw in the plan
Of his life, that love fail'd to pass over.
That child
Alone did not fear him, nor shrink from him; smiled
To his frown, and dispell'd it.
The sweet sportive elf
Seem'd the type of some joy lost, and miss'd, in himself.
Ever welcome he suffer'd her glad face to glide
In on hours when to others his door was denied:
And many a time with a mute, moody look
He would watch her at prattle and play, like a brook
Whose babble disturbs not the quietest spot,
But soothes us because we need answer it not.

But few years had pass'd o'er that childhood before
A change came among them. A letter, which bore
Sudden consequence with it, one morning was placed
In the hands of the lord of the château. He paced
To and fro in his chamber a whole night alone
After reading that letter. At dawn he was gone.
Weeks pass'd. When he came back again he return'd
With a tall, ancient dame from whose lips the child learn'd
That they were of the same race and name. With a face
Sad and anxious, to this wither'd stock of the race
He confided the orphan, and left them alone

In the old lonely house.
In a few days 't was known,
To the angry surprise of half Paris, that one
Of the chiefs of that party which, still clinging on
To the banner that bears the white lilies of France,
Will fight 'neath no other, nor yet for the chance
Of restoring their own, had renounced the watch-word
And the creed of his youth in unsheathing his sword
For a Fatherland father'd no more (such is fate!)
By legitimate parents.
And meanwhile, elate
And in no wise disturbed by what Paris might say,
The new soldier thus wrote to a friend far away: —
'To the life of inaction farewell! After all,
'Creeds the oldest may crumble, and dynasties fall,
'But the sole grand Legitimacy will endure,
'In whatever makes death noble, life strong and pure.
'Freedom! action! . . . the desert to breathe in — the lance
'Of the Arab to follow! I go! *Vive la France!*'

Few and rare were the meetings henceforth, as years fled,
'Twixt the child and the soldier. The two women led
Lone lives in the lone house. Meanwhile the child grew
Into girlhood; and, like a sunbeam, sliding through
Her green quiet years, changed by gentle degrees
To the loveliest vision of youth a youth sees
In his loveliest fancies: as pure as a pearl,
And as perfect: a noble and innocent girl,
With eighteen sweet summers dissolved in the light
Of her lovely and lovable eyes, soft and bright!
Then her guardian wrote to the dame, . . . 'Let Constance

'Go with you to Paris. I trust that in France
'I may be ere the close of the year. I confide
'My life's treasure to you. Let her see, at your side,
'The world which we live in.'
To Paris then came
Constance to abide with that old stately dame
In that old stately Faubourg.

The young Englishman
Thus met her. 'T was there their acquaintance began,
There it closed. That old miracle — Love-at-first-sight —
Needs no explanations. The heart reads aright
Its destiny sometimes. His love neither chidden
Nor check'd, the young soldier was graciously bidden
An habitual guest to that house by the dame.
His own candid graces, the world-honour'd name
Of his father (in him not dishonour'd) were both
Fair titles to favour. His love, nothing loath,
The old lady observed, was return'd by Constance.
And as the child's uncle his absence from France
Yet prolong'd, she (thus easing long self-gratulation)
Wrote to him a lengthen'd and moving narration
Of the graces and gifts of the young English wooer:
His father's fair fame; the boy's deference to her
His love for Constance, — unaffected, sincere;
And the girl's love for him, read by her in those clear
Limpid eyes; then the pleasure with which she awaited
Her cousin's approval of all she had stated.

At length from that cousin an answer there came,
Brief, stern; such as stunn'd and astonish'd the dame.

'Let Constance leave Paris with you on the day
'You receive this. Until my return she may stay
'At her convent awhile. If my niece wishes ever
'To behold me again, understand, she will never
'Wed that man.
'You have broken faith with me. Farewell!'

No appeal from that sentence.
It needs not to tell
The tears of Constance, nor the grief of her lover:
The dream they had laid out their lives in was over.

Bravely strove the young soldier to look in the face
Of a life, where invisible hands seem'd to trace
O'er the threshold, these words . . . 'Hope no more!'
Unreturn'd
Had his love been, the strong manful heart would have spurn'd
That weakness which suffers a woman to lie
At the roots of man's life, like a canker, and dry
And wither the sap of life's purpose. But there
Lay the bitterer part of the pain! Could he dare
To forget he was loved? that he grieved not alone?
Recording a love that drew sorrow upon
The woman he loved, for himself dare he seek
Surcease to that sorrow, which thus held him weak,
Beat him down, and destroy'd him?
News reach'd him indeed,
Thro' a comrade, who brought him a letter to read
From the lady whom Constance had lived with ('t was one
To whom, when at Paris, the boy had been known,
A Frenchman, and friend of the Faubourg), which said

That Constance, tho' never a murmur betray'd
What she suffer'd, in silence grew paler each day,
And seem'd visibly drooping and dying away.
It was then he sought death.

XVII.

Thus the tale ends. 'T was told
With such broken, passionate words, as unfold
In glimpses alone, a coil'd grief. Thro' each pause
Of its fitful recital, in raw gusty flaws,
The rain shook the canvas, unheeded; aloof,
And unheeded, the night-wind around the tent-roof
At intervals wirbled. And when all was said,
The sick man, exhausted, droop'd backward his head,
And fell into a feverish slumber.
Long while
Sat the Sœur Seraphine, in deep thought. The still smile
That was wont, angel-wise, to inhabit her face
And make it like heaven, was fled from its place
In her eyes, on her lips; and a deep sadness there
Seem'd to darken the lines of long sorrow and care,
As low to herself she sigh'd . . .
'Hath it, Eugène,
'Been so long, then, the struggle? . . . and yet, all in vain!
'Nay, not all in vain! Shall the world gain a man,
'And yet Heaven lose a soul? Have I done all I can?
'Soul to soul, did he say? Soul to soul, be it so!
'And then — soul of mine, whither? whither?'

XVIII.

Large, slow,
Silent tears in those deep eyes ascended, and fell.

Here, at least, I have fail'd not' . . . she mused
. . . 'this is well!'
She drew from her bosom two letters.
In one,
A mother's heart, wild with alarm for her son,
Breathed bitterly forth its despairing appeal.
'The pledge of a love owed to thee, O Lucile!
'The hope of a home saved by thee — of a heart
'Which hath never since then (thrice endear'd as
thou art!)
'Ceased to bless thee, to pray for thee, save! . .
save my son!
'And if not' . . . the letter went brokenly on,
'Heaven help us!'
Then follow'd, from Alfred, a few
Blotted heart-broken pages. He mournfully drew,
With pathos, the picture of that earnest youth,
So unlike his own: how in beauty and truth
He had nurtured that nature, so simple and brave:
And how he had striven his son's youth to save
From the errors so sadly redeem'd in his own,
And so deeply repented: how thus, in that son,
In whose youth he had garner'd his age, he had
seem'd
To be bless'd by a pledge that the past was re-
deem'd,
And forgiven. He bitterly went on to speak
Of the boy's baffled love; in which fate seem'd to
break
Unawares on his dreams with retributive pain,
And the ghosts of the past rose to scourge back
again
The hopes of the future. To sue for consent
Pride forbade: and the hope his old foe might
relent
Experience rejected . . . 'My life for the boy's!'
(He exclaim'd); 'for I die with my son, if he dies!
'Lucile! Heaven bless you for all you have done!
'Save him, save him, Lucile! save my son! save
my son!'

XIX.

'Ay!' murmur'd the Sœur Seraphine ... 'heart to heart!
'*There*, at least, I have fail'd not! Fulfill'd is my part?
'Accomplish'd my mission? One act crowns the whole.
'Do I linger? Nay, be it so, then!... Soul to soul!'
She knelt down, and pray'd. Still the boy slumber'd on.
Dawn broke. The pale nun from the bedside was gone.

XX.

Meanwhile, 'mid his aides-de-camp, busily bent
O'er the daily reports, in his well-order'd tent
There sits a French General — bronzed by the sun
And sear'd by the sands of Algeria. One
Who forth from the wars of the wild Kabylee
Had strangely and rapidly risen to be
The idol and darling, the dream and the star
Of the younger French chivalry: daring in war,
And wary in council. He enter'd, indeed,
Late in life (and discarding his Bourbonite creed)
The Army of France: and had risen, in part
From a singular aptitude proved for the art
Of that wild desert warfare of ambush, surprise,
And stratagem, which to the French camp supplies
Its subtlest intelligence; partly from chance;
Partly, too, from a name and position which France
Was proud to put forward; but mainly, in fact,
From the prudence to plan, and the daring to act,
In frequent emergencies startlingly shown,
To the rank which he now held, — intrepidly won
With many a wound, trench'd in many a scar,
From fierce Milianah and Sidi-Sakhdar.

XXI.

All within, and without, that warm tent seems to bear
Smiling token of provident order and care.
All about, a well-fed, well-clad soldiery stands
In groups round the music of mirth-breathing bands.
In and out of the tent, all day long, to and fro,
The messengers come, and the messengers go,
Upon missions of mercy, or errands of toil:
To report how the sapper contends with the soil
In the terrible trench, how the sick man is faring
In the hospital tent: and, combining, comparing,
Constructing, within moves the brain of one man,
Moving all.
He is bending his brow o'er some plan
For the hospital service, wise, skilful, humane.
The officer standing beside him is fain
To refer to the angel solicitous cares
Of the Sisters of Charity: one he declares
To be known thro' the camp as a seraph of grace:
He has seen, all have seen her indeed, in each place
Where suffering is seen, silent, active — the Sœur . . .
Sœur . . . how do they call her?

'Ay, truly, of her
'I have heard much,' the General, musing, replies;
'And we owe her already (unless rumour lies)
'The lives of not few of our bravest. You mean . . .
'Ay, how do they call her? . . . the Sœur — Seraphine
'(Is it not so?). I rarely forget names once heard.'

'Yes; the Sœur Seraphine. Her I meant.'
'On my word,

'I have much wish'd to see her. I fancy I trace,
'In some facts traced to her, something more than the grace
'Of an angel: I mean an acute human mind,
'Ingenious, constructive, intelligent. Find,
'And, if possible, let her come to me. We shall,
'I think, aid each other.'
'*Oui, mon Général;*
'I believe she has lately obtain'd the permission
'To tend some sick man in the Second Division
'Of our Ally: they say a relation.'
'Ay, so?
'A relation?'
''T is said so.'
'The name do you know?
'*Non, mon Général.*'
While they spoke yet there went
A murmur and stir round the door of the tent.
'A Sister of Charity craves, in a case
'Of urgent and serious importance, the grace
'Of brief private speech with the General there.
'Will the General speak with her?'
'Bid her declare
'Her mission.'
She will not. She craves to be seen
And be heard.
Well, her name then.
The Sœur Seraphine.
The Sœur Seraphine! Strange! *On parle du soleil,*
Et en voici les rayons! Dépêche, Colonel!
Clear the tent. She may enter.

XXII.

The tent has been clear'd.
The chieftain stroked moodily somewhat his beard,
A sable long silver'd: and press'd down his brow
On his hand, heavily. All his countenance, now
Unwitness'd, at once fell dejected, and dreary,

As a curtain let fall by a hand that 's grown weary,
Into puckers and folds. From his lips, unrepress'd,
Steals th' impatient quick sigh, which reveals in man's breast
A conflict conceal'd, and experience at strife
With itself, — the vex'd heart's passing protest on life.
He turn'd to his papers. He heard the light tread
Of a faint foot behind him: and, lifting his head,
Said, 'Sit, Holy Sister! your worth is well known
'To the hearts of our soldiers; nor less to my own.
'I have much wish'd to see you. I owe you some thanks:
'In the name of all those you have saved to our ranks
'I record them. Sit! Now then, your mission?' The nun
Paused silent. The General eyed her anon
More keenly. His aspect grew troubled. A change
Darken'd over his features. He mutter'd . . .
'Strange! strange!
'Any face should so strongly remind me of *her!*
'Fool! again the delirium, the dream! does it stir?
'Does it move as of old? Psha!
'Sit, Sister! I wait
'Your answer, my time halts but hurriedly. State
'The cause why you seek me?'
'The cause? ay, the cause!'
She vaguely repeated. Then, after a pause, —
As one who, awaked unawares, would put back
The sleep that forever returns in the track
Of dreams which, though scared and dispersed, not the less
Settle back to faint eyelids that yield 'neath their stress,
Like doves to a penthouse, — a movement she made,
Less toward him than away from herself; droop'd her head

And folded her hands on her bosom: long, spare,
Fatigued, mournful hands! Not a stream of stray hair
Escaped the pale bands; scarce more pale than the face
Which they bound and lock'd up in a rigid white case.
She fix'd her eyes on him. There crept a vague awe
O'er his sense, such as ghosts cast.
'Eugène de Luvois,
'The cause which recalls me again to your side,
'Is a promise that rests unfulfill'd,' she replied.
'I come to fulfil it.'
He sprang from the place
Where he sat, press'd his hand, as in doubt, o'er his face;
And, cautiously feeling each step o'er the ground
That he trod on (as one who walks fearing the sound
Of his footstep may startle and scare out of sight
Some strange sleeping creature on which he would 'light
Unawares), crept towards her; one heavy hand laid
On her shoulder in silence; bent o'er her his head,
Search'd her face with a long look of troubled appeal
Against doubt; stagger'd backward, and murmur'd . . . 'Lucile!
'Thus we meet then? . . . here! . . . thus!'
'Soul to soul, ay, Eugène,
'As I pledged you my word that we should meet again.
Dead, . . .' she murmur'd, 'long dead! all that lived in our lives —
'Thine and mine — saving that which ev'n life's self survives,
The soul! 'T is my soul seeks thine own. What may reach

'From my life to thy life (so wide each from each!)
'Save the soul to the soul? To thy soul I would
speak.
'May I do so?'
He said (work'd and white was his cheek
As he raised it), 'Speak to me!'
Deep, tender, serene,
And sad was the gaze which the Sœur Seraphine
Held on him. She spoke.

XXIII.

As some minstrel may fling,
Preluding the music yet mute in each string,
A swift hand athwart the hush'd heart of the whole,
Seeking which note most fitly may first move the
soul;
And, leaving untroubled the deep chords below,
Move pathetic in numbers remote; — even so
The voice which was moving the heart of that man
Far away from its yet voiceless purpose began,
Far away in the pathos remote of the past;
Until, through her words, rose before him, at last,
Bright and dark in their beauty, the hopes that
were gone
Unaccomplish'd from life.
He was mute.

XXIV.

She went on.
And still further down the dim past did she lead
Each yielding remembrance, far, far off, to feed
'Mid the pastures of youth, in the twilight of hope,
And the valleys of boyhood, the fresh-flower'd slope
Of life's dawning land!
'T is the heart of a boy,
With its indistinct, passionate prescience of joy!
The unproved desire — the unaim'd aspiration —
The deep, conscious life that forestalls consumma-
tion;

With ever a flitting delight — one arm's length
In advance of th' august inward impulse.
The strength
Of the spirit which troubles the seed in the sand
With the birth of the palm-tree! Let ages expand
The glorious creature! The ages lie shut
(Safe, see!) in the seed, at Time's signal to put
Forth their beauty and power, leaf by leaf, layer
on layer,
Till the palm strikes the sun, and stands broad in
blue air.
So the palm in the palm-seed! so, slowly — so,
wrought
Year by year unperceived, hope on hope, thought
by thought,
Trace the growth of the man from its germ in the
boy.
Ah, but Nature, that nurtures, may also destroy!
Charm the wind and the sun, lest some chance in-
tervene!
While the leaf 's in the bud, while the stem 's in the
green,
A light bird bends the branch, a light breeze
breaks the bough,
Which, if spared by the light breeze, the light bird,
may grow
To baffle the tempest, and rock the high nest,
And take both the bird and the breeze to its
breast.
Shall we save a whole forest in sparing one seed?
Save the man in the boy? in the thought save the
deed?
Let the whirlwind uproot the grown tree, if it
can!
Save the seed from the north wind. So let the
grown man
Face out fate. Spare the man-seed in youth.
He was dumb.
She went one step further.

XXV.

Lo! manhood is come.
And love, the wild song-bird, hath flown to the tree,
And the whirlwind comes after. Now prove we and see:
What shade from the leaf? what support from the branch?
Spreads the leaf broad and fair? holds the bough strong and stanch?
There, he saw himself — dark, as he stood on that night,
The last when they met and they parted: a sight
For heaven to mourn o'er, for hell to rejoice!
An ineffable tenderness troubled her voice;
It grew weak, and a sigh broke it through.
Then he said
(Never looking at her, never lifting his head,
As though, at his feet, there lay visibly hurl'd
Those fragments), 'It was not a love, 'twas a world,
'T was a life that lay ruin'd, Lucile!'

XXVI.

She went on,
'So be it! Perish Babel, arise Babylon!
'From ruins like these rise the fanes that shall last,
'And to build up the future Heaven shatters the past.'
'Ay,' he moodily murmur'd, 'and who cares to scan
'The heart's perish'd world, if the world gains a man?
'From the past to the present, tho' late, I appeal;
'To the nun Seraphine, from the woman Lucile!'

XXVII.

Lucile! . . . the old name — the old self! silenced long:
Heard once more! felt once more!
As some soul to the throng
Of invisible spirits admitted, baptized
By death to a new name and nature — surprised
'Mid the songs of the seraphs, hears faintly, and far,
Some voice from the earth, left below a dim star,
Calling to her forlornly; and (sadd'ning the psalms
Of the angels, and piercing the Paradise palms!)
The name borne 'mid earthly belovèds on earth
Sigh'd above some lone grave in the land of her birth; —
So that one word . . . Lucile! . . . stirr'd the Sœur Seraphine,
For a moment. Anon she resumed her serene
And concentrated calm.
'Let the Nun, then, retrace
'The life of the soldier!' . . . she said, with a face
That glow'd, gladdening her words.
'To the Present I come
'Leave the Past!'
There her voice rose, and seem'd as when some
Pale Priestess proclaims from her temple the praise
Of the hero whose brows she is crowning with bays.
Step by step did she follow his path from the place
Where their two paths diverged. Year by year did she trace
(Familiar with all) his, the soldier's, existence.
Her words were of trial, endurance, resistance;
Of the leaguer around this besieged world of ours:
And the same sentinels that ascend the same towers
And report the same foes, the same fears, the same strife,
Waged alike to the limits of each human life.
She went on to speak of the lone moody lord,
Shut up in his lone moody halls: every word

Held the weight of a tear: she recorded the good
He had patiently wrought thro' a whole neighbourhood;
And the blessing that lived on the lips of the poor,
By the peasant's hearthstone, or the cottager's door.
There she paused: and her accents seem'd dipp'd in the hue
Of his own sombre heart, as the picture she drew
Of the poor, proud, sad spirit, rejecting love's wages,
Yet working love's work; reading backwards life's pages
For penance; and stubbornly, many a time,
Both missing the moral, and marring the rhyme.
Then she spoke of the soldier! . . . the man's work and fame,
The pride of a nation, a world's just acclaim!
Life's inward approval!

XXVIII.

Her voice reach'd his heart,
And sank lower. She spoke of herself: how, apart
And unseen, — far away, — she had watch'd, year by year,
With how many a blessing, how many a tear,
And how many a prayer, every stage in the strife:
Guess'd the thought in the deed: traced the love in the life:
Bless'd the man in the man's work!
'*Thy* work . . . oh not mine!
'Thine, Lucile!' . . . he exclaim'd . . . 'all the worth of it thine,
'If worth there be in it!'
Her answer convey'd
His reward, and her own: joy that cannot be said
Alone by the voice . . . eyes — face — spoke silently:
All the woman, one grateful emotion!
And she

A poor Sister of Charity! hers a life spent
In one silent effort for others! . . .
She bent
Her divine face above him, and fill'd up his heart
With the look that glow'd from it.
Then slow, with soft art,
Fix'd her aim, and moved to it

XXIX.

He, the soldier humane,
He, the hero; whose heart hid in glory the pain
Of a youth disappointed; whose life had made known
The value of man's life! . . . that youth over thrown
And retrieved, had it left him no pity for youth
In another? his own life of strenuous truth
Accomplish'd in act, had it taught him no care
For the life of another? . . . oh no! everywhere
In the camp, which she moved thro', she came face to face
With some noble token, some generous trace
Of his active humanity . . .
'Well,' he replied,
'If it be so?'
'I come from the solemn bedside
'Of a man that is dying,' she said. 'While we speak,
'A life is in jeopardy.'
'Quick then! you seek
'Aid, or medicine, or what?'
''T is not needed,' she said,
'Medicine? yes, for the mind! 'T is a heart that needs aid!
'You, Eugène de Luvois, you (and you only) can
'Save the life of this man. Will you save it?'
'What man?
'How? . . where? . . . can you ask?'
She went rapidly on

To her object in brief, vivid words. . . . The young
son
Of Matilda and Alfred — the boy lying there
Half a mile from that tent door — the father's
despair,
The mother's deep anguish — the pride of the boy
In the father — the father's one hope and one joy
In the son: — the son now — wounded, dying! She
told
Of the father's stern struggle with life: the boy's
bold
Pure, and beautiful nature: the fair life before him
If that life were but spared . . . yet a word might
restore him!
The boy's broken love for the niece of Eugène:
Its pathos: the girl's love for him: how, half slain
In his tent she had found him; won from him the
tale;
Sought to nurse back his life; found her efforts still
fail;
Beaten back by a love that was stronger than
life;
Of how bravely till then he had stood in that strife
Wherein England and France in their best blood,
at last,
Had bathed from remembrance the wounds of the
past,
And shall nations be nobler than men? Are not
great
Men the models of nations? For what is a state
But the many's confused imitation of one?
Shall he, the fair hero of France, on the son
Of his ally seek vengeance, destroying perchance
An innocent life, — here, when England and France
Have forgiven the sins of their fathers of yore,
And baptized a new hope in their sons' recent
gore?'
She went on to tell how the boy had clung still
To life, for the sake of life's uses, until

From his weak hands the strong effort dropp'd, stricken down
By the news that the heart of Constance, like his own,
Was breaking beneath . . .
But there 'Hold!' he exclaim'd,
Interrupting, 'forbear!' . . . . his whole face was inflamed
With the heart's swarthy thunder, which yet, while she spoke,
Had been gathering silent — at last the storm broke
In grief or in wrath. . . .
'T is to him, then,' he cried, . . .
Checking suddenly short the tumultuous stride,
'That I owe these late greetings — for him you are here —
'For his sake you seek me — for him, it is clear,
'You have deign'd at the last to bethink you again
'Of this long forgotten existence!'
'Eugène!'
'Ha! fool that I was!' . . . he went on, . . . 'and just now
'While you spoke yet, my heart was beginning to grow
'Almost boyish again, almost sure of *one* friend!
'Yet this was the meaning of all — this the end!
'Be it so! There 's a sort of slow justice (admit!)
'In this — that the word that man's finger hath writ
'In fire on my heart, I return him at last.
'Let him learn that word — Never!'
'Ah, still to the past
'Must the present be vassal?' she said. 'In the hour
We last parted I urged you to put forth the power
Which I felt to be yours, in the conquest of life.
Yours, the promise to strive: mine, — to watch o'er the strife.
'I foresaw you would conquer; you *have* conquer'd much.

'Much, indeed, that is noble! I hail it as such,
'And am here to record and applaud it. I saw
'Not the less in your nature, Eugène de Luvois,
'One peril — one point where I fear'd you would fail
'To subdue that worst foe which a man can assail, —
'Himself: and I promised that, if I should see
'My champion once falter, or bend the brave knee,
'That moment would bring me again to his side.
'That moment is come! for that peril was pride,
'And you falter. I plead for yourself, and one other,
'For that gentle child without father or mother
'To whom you are both. I plead, soldier of France,
'For your own nobler nature — and plead for Constance!'
At the sound of that name he averted his head.
'Constance! . . . . Ay, she enter'd my lone life,' (he said)
'When its sun was long set; and hung over its night
'Her own starry childhood. I have but that light,
'In the midst of much darkness! Who names me but she
'With titles of love? and what rests there for me
'In the silence of age save the voice of that child?
'The child of my own better life, undefiled!
'My creature, carved out of my heart of hearts!'
'Say,'
Said Lucile, solemnly — 'are you able to lay
'Your hand as a knight on your heart as a man
'And swear that, whatever may happen, you can
'Feel assured for the life you thus cherish?'
'How so?
She look'd up. 'If the boy should die thus?'
'Yes, I know

'What your look would imply . . . this sleek
stranger forsooth!
'Because on his cheek was the red rose of youth
The heart of my niece must break for it!'
She cried,
'Nay, but hear me yet further!'
With slow heavy stride,
Unheeding her words, he was pacing the tent,
He was muttering low to himself as he went.
'Ay, these young things lie safe in our heart just
so long
'As their wings are in growing; and when these
are strong
'They break it, and farewell! the bird flies!' . . .
The nun
Laid her hand on the soldier, and murmur'd, 'The
sun
'Is descending, life fleets while we talk thus! oh,
yet
'Let this day upon one final victory set,
'And complete a life's conquest!'
He said, 'Understand!
'If Constance wed the son of this man, by whose
hand
'My heart hath been robb'd, she is lost to my life!
'Can her home be my home? Can I claim in the
wife
'Of that man's son the child of my age? At her
side
'Shall he stand on my hearth? Shall I sue to the
bride
'Of . . . enough!
'Ah, and you immemorial halls
'Of my Norman forefathers, whose shadow yet
falls
'On my fancy, and fuses hope, memory, past,
'Present, — all, in one silence! old trees to the
blast
Of the North Sea repeating the tale of old days,

'Never more, never more in the wild bosky ways
'Shall I hear thro' your umbrage ancestral the wind
'Prophesy as of yore, when it shook the deep mind
'Of my boyhood, with whispers from out the far years
'Of love, fame, the raptures life cools down with tears!
'Henceforth shall the tread of a Vargrave alone
'Rouse your echoes?'
'O think not,' she said, 'of the son
Of the man whom unjustly you hate! only think
'Of this young human creature, that cries from the brink
'Of a grave to your mercy!
'Recall your own words
'(Words my memory mournfully ever records!)
'How with love may be wreck'd a whole life! then, Eugène,
'Look with me (still those words in our ears!) once again
'At this young soldier sinking from life here — dragg'd down
'By the weight of the love in his heart: no renown,
'No fame comforts *him!* nations shout not above
'The lone grave down to which he is bearing the love
'Which life has rejected! Will *you* stand apart?
'You, with such a love's memory deep in your heart!
'You the hero, whose life hath perchance been led on
'Thro' the deeds it hath wrought to the fame it hath won,
'By recalling the visions and dreams of a youth,
'Such as lies at your door now: who have but, in truth,
'To stretch forth a hand, to speak only one word,

'And by that word you rescue a life!'
He was stirr'd.
Still he sought to put from him the cup; bow'd his face
On his hand; and anon, as tho' wishing to chase
With one angry gesture his own thoughts aside,
He sprang up, brush'd past her, and bitterly cried
'No! — Constance a Vargrave! — I cannot consent!'
Then up rose the Sœur Seraphine.
The low tent,
In her sudden uprising, seem'd dwarf'd by the height
From which those imperial eyes pour'd the light
Of their deep silent sadness upon him.
No wonder
He felt, as it were, his own stature shrink under
The compulsion of that grave regard! For between
The Duc de Luvois and the Sœur Seraphine
At that moment there rose all the height of one soul
O'er another; she look'd down on him from the whole
Lonely length of a life. There were sad nights and days,
There were long months and years in that heart-searching gaze;
And her voice, when she spoke, with sharp pathos thrill'd thro'
And transfix'd him.
'Eugène de Luvois, but for you,
'I might have been now — not this wandering nun,
'But a mother, a wife — pleading, not for the son
'Of another, but blessing some child of my own,
'His, — the man's that I once loved! . . . Hush, that which is done
'I regret not. I breathe no reproaches. That 's best
'Which God sends. 'T was His will: it is mine. And the rest

'Of that riddle I will not look back to. He reads
'In your heart — He that judges of all thoughts
and deeds,
'With eyes, mine forestall not! This only I say:
'You have not the right (read it, you, as you
may!)
'To say . . . "I am the wrong'd." ' . . .
'Have I wrong'd thee? — wrong'd *thee!*'
He falter'd, 'Lucile, ah, Lucile!'
'Nay, not me,'
She murmur'd, 'but man! The lone nun standing
here
'Has no claim upon earth, and is pass'd from the
sphere
'Of earth's wrongs and earth's reparations. But
she,
'The dead woman, Lucile, she whose grave is in
me,
'Demands from her grave reparation to man,
'Reparation to God. Heed, O heed, while you
can
'This voice from the grave!'
'Hush!' he moan'd, 'I obey
'The Sœur Seraphine. There, Lucile! let this
pay
'Every debt that is due to that grave. Now lead
on:
'I follow you, Sœur Seraphine! . . . To the son
'Of Lord Alfred Vargrave . . . and then,' . . .
As he spoke
He lifted the tent-door, and down the dun smoke
Pointed out the dark bastions, with batteries crown'd,
Of the city beneath them . . .
'Then, *there*, underground,
'And *valete et plaudite*, soon as may be!
'Let the old tree go down to the earth — the old
tree,
'With the worm at its heart! Lay the axe to the
root!

Who will miss the old stump, so we save the young
shoot?
A Vargrave! . . . this pays all . . . . Lead on! . . . .
In the seed
'Save the forest! . . .
'I follow . . . forth, forth! where you lead.'

XXX.

The day was declining; a day sick and damp.
In a blank ghostly glare shone the bleak ghostly
camp
Of the English. Alone in his dim, spectral tent
(Himself the wan spectre of youth), with eyes bent
On the daylight departing, the sick man was sitting
Upon his low pallet. These thoughts, vaguely
flitting,
Cross'd the silence between him and death, which
seem'd near.
—'Pain o'erreaches itself, so is baulk'd! else, how
bear
'This intense and intolerable solitude,
'With its eye on my heart and its hand on my
blood?
'Pulse by pulse! Day goes down: yet she comes
not again.
'Other suffering, doubtless, where hope is more
plain,
'Claims her elsewhere. I die, strange! and scarcely
feel sad.
'Oh, to think of Constance *thus*, and not to go mad!
'But Death, it would seem, dulls the sense to his
own
'Dull doings . . .'

XXXI.

Between those sick eyes and the sun
A shadow fell thwart.

XXXII.

'T is the pale nun once more!
But who stands at her side, mute and dark in the door?
How oft had he watch'd through the glory and gloom
Of the battle, with long, longing looks that dim plume
Which now (one stray sunbeam upon it) shook stoop'd
To where the tent-curtain, dividing, was loop'd!
How that stern face had haunted and hover'd about
The dreams it still scared! through what fond fear and doubt
Had the boy yearn'd in heart to the hero! (What 's like
A boy's love for some famous man?) . . . Oh, to strike
A wild path through the battle, down striking perchance
Some rash foeman too near the great soldier of France,
And so fall in his glorious regard! . . . Oft, how oft
Had his heart flash'd this hope out, whilst watching aloft
The dim battle that plume dance and dart — never seen
So near till this moment! how eager to glean
Every stray word, dropp'd through the camp-babble in praise
Of his hero — each tale of old venturous days
In the desert! And now . . . could he speak out his heart
Face to face with that man ere he died!

XXXIII.

With a start
The sick soldier sprang up: the blood sprang up in him,
To his throat, and o'erthrew him: he reel'd back: a dim
Sanguine haze fill'd his eyes; in his ears rose the din
And rush, as of cataracts loosen'd within,
Through which he saw faintly, and heard, the pale nun
(Looking larger than life, where she stood in the sun)
Point to him and murmur, 'Behold!' Then that plume
Seem'd to wave like a fire, and fade off in the gloom
Which momently put out the world.

XXXIV.

To his side
Moved the man the boy dreaded yet loved . . .
'Ah!' . . . he sigh'd,
'The smooth brow, the fair Vargrave face! and those eyes,
'All the mother's! The old things again!
'Do not rise.
'You suffer, young man?'

The Boy.

Sir, I die.

The Duke.

Not so young

The Boy.

So young? yes! and yet I have tangled among

The fray'd warp and woof of this brief life of mine
Other lives than my own. Could my death but untwine
That vext skein . . . but it will not. Yes, Duke, young — so young!
And I knew you not? yet I have done you a wrong
Irreparable! . . . late, too late to repair.
If I knew any means . . . but I know none! . . . I swear,
If this broken fraction of time could extend
Into infinite lives of atonement, no end
Would seem too remote for my grief (could that be!)
To include it! Not too late, however, for me
To entreat: is it too late for you to forgive?

THE DUKE.

Your wrong — my forgiveness — explain.

THE BOY.

Could I live!
Such a very few hours left to life, yet I shrink,
I falter! . . . Yes, Duke, your forgiveness I think
Should free my soul hence.
Ah! you could not surmise
That a boy's beating heart, burning thoughts, longing eyes
Were following you evermore (heeded not!)
While the battle was flowing between us: no, what
Eager, dubious footsteps at nightfall oft went
With the wind and the rain, round and round your blind tent,
Persistent and wild as the wind and the rain,
Unnoticed as these, weak as these, and as vain!
Oh, how obdurate then look'd your tent! The waste air

Grew stern at the gleam which said . . . 'Off! he
is there!'
I know not what merciful mystery now
Brings you here, whence the man whom you see
lying low
Other footsteps (not those!) must soon bear to the
grave.
But death is at hand, and the few words I have
Yet to speak, I must speak them at once.
Duke, I swear,
As I lie here, (Death's angel too close not to
hear!)
That I meant not this wrong to you. Duc de
Luvois,
I loved your niece — loved? why, I *love* her! I
saw,
And, seeing, how could I but love her? I
seem'd
Born to love her. Alas, were that all! Had I
dream'd
Of this love's cruel consequence as it rests now
Ever fearfully present before me, I vow
That the secret, unknown, had gone down to the
tomb
Into which I descend . . . Oh why, whilst there was
room
In life left for warning, had no one the heart
To warn me? Had any one whisper'd . . . 'De-
part!'
To the hope the whole world seem'd in league then
to nurse!
Had any one hinted . . . 'Beware of the curse
'Which is coming!' There was not a voice raised
to tell,
Not a hand moved to warn from the blow ere it
fell,
And then . . . then the blow fell on *both!* This is
why
I implore you to pardon that great injury

Wrought on her, and, thro' her, wrought on you,
Heaven knows
How unwittingly!

THE DUKE.

Ah! . . and, young soldier, suppose
That I came here to seek, not grant, pardon? —

THE BOY.

Of whom?

THE DUKE.

Of yourself.

THE BOY.

Duke, I bear in my heart to the tomb
No boyish resentment; not one lonely thought
That honours you not. In all this there is naught
'T is for me to forgive.
Every glorious act
Of your great life starts forward, an eloquent fact,
To confirm in my boy's heart its faith in your own.
And have I not hoarded, to ponder upon,
A hundred great acts from your life? Nay, all these,
Were they so many lying and false witnesses,
Does there rest not *one* voice which was never untrue?
I believe in Constance, Duke, as she does in you!
In this great world around us, wherever we turn,
Some grief irremediable we discern:
And yet — there sits God, calm in Heaven above!
Do we trust one whit less in his justice or love?
I judge not.

THE DUKE.

Enough! Hear at last, then, the truth.
Your father and I — foes we were in our youth.

It matters not why. Yet thus much understand:
The hope of my youth was signed out by his hand.
I was not of those whom the buffets of fate
Tame and teach: and my heart buried slain love
in hate.
If your own frank young heart, yet inconscious of
all
Which turns the heart's blood in its springtide to
gall,
And unable to guess even aught that the furrow
Across these gray brows hides of sin or of sorrow,
Comprehends not the evil and grief of my life,
'T will at least comprehend how intense was the
strife
Which is closed in this act of atonement, whereby
I seek in the son of my youth's enemy
The friend of my age. Let the present release
Here acquitted the past! In the name of my
niece,
Whom for my life in yours as a hostage I give,
Are you great enough, boy, to forgive me, — and
live?

Whilst he spoke thus, a doubtful tumultuous joy
Chased its fleeting effects o'er the face of the boy:
As when some stormy moon, in a long cloud con-
fined,
Struggles outward thro' shadows, the varying wind
Alternates, and bursts, self-surprised, from her
prison,
So that slow joy grew clear in his face. He had
risen
To answer the Duke; but strength fail'd every
limb;
A strange happy feebleness trembled thro' him.
With a faint cry of rapturous wonder, he sank
On the breast of the nun, who stood near.
'Yes, boy! thank
This guardian angel,' the Duke said. 'I — you,

'We owe all to her. Crown her work. Live! be true
'To your young life's fair promise, and live for her sake!'
'Yes, Duke: I will live. I *must* live — live to make
'My whole life the answer you claim,' the boy said,
'For joy does not kill!'
Back again the faint head
Declined on the nun's gentle bosom. She saw
His lips quiver, and motion'd the Duke to withdraw
And leave them a moment together.
He eyed
Them both with a wistful regard; turn'd, and sigh'd,
And lifted the tent door, and pass'd from the tent.

XXXV.

Like a furnace, the fervid, intense occident
From its hot seething levels a great glare struck up
On the sick metal sky. And, as out of a cup
Some witch watches boiling wild portents arise,
Monstrous clouds, mass'd, misshapen, and tinged with strange dyes,
Hover'd over the red fume, and changed to weird shapes
As of snakes, salamanders, efts, lizards, storks, apes,
Chimeras, and hydras: whilst — ever the same —
In the midst of all these (creatures fused by his flame,
And changed by his influence!), changeless, as when,
Ere he lit down to death generations of men,
O'er that crude and ungainly creation, which there
With wild shapes this cloud-world seem'd to mimic in air,

The eye of Heaven's all-judging witness, he shone,
And shall shine on the ages we reach not — the sun!

XXXVI.

Nature posted her parable thus in the skies,
And the man's heart bore witness. Life's vapours arise
And fall, pass and change, group themselves and revolve
Round the great central life, which is Love: these dissolve
And resume themselves, here assume beauty, there terror,
And the phantasmagoria of infinite error,
And endless complexity, lasts but a while;
Life's self, the immortal, immutable smile
Of God on the soul, in the deep heart of Heaven
Lives changeless, unchanged: and our morning and even
Are earth's alternations, not Heaven's.

XXXVII.

While he yet
Watch'd the skies, with this thought in his heart; while he set
Thus unconsciously all his life forth in his mind,
Summ'd it up, search'd it out, proved it vapour and wind,
And embraced the new life which that hour had reveal'd, —
Love's life, which earth's life had defaced and conceal'd;
Lucile left the tent and stood by him.
Her tread
Aroused him; and, turning towards her, he said:
'O Sœur Seraphine, are you happy?'
'Eugène,
'What is happier than to have hoped not in vain?'

She answer'd, — 'And you?'
'Yes.'
'You do not repent?
'No.'
'Thank Heaven!' she murmur'd. He musingly bent
His looks on the sunset, and somewhat apart
Where he stood, sigh'd, as tho' to his innermost heart,
'O blessed are they, amongst whom I was not,
'Whose morning unclouded, without stain or spot,
'Predicts a pure evening; who, sun-like, in light
'Have traversed, unsullied, the world, and set bright!'

But she in response, 'Mark yon ship far away,
'Asleep on the wave, in the last light of day,
'With all its hush'd thunders shut up! Would you know
'A thought which came to me a few days ago,
'Whilst watching those ships? . . . When the great Ship of Life,
'Surviving, though shatter'd, the tumult and strife
'Of earth's angry element, — masts broken short,
'Decks drench'd, bulwarks beaten — drives safe into port,
'When the Pilot of Galilee, seen on the strand,
'Stretches over the waters a welcoming hand;
'When, heeding no longer the sea's baffled roar,
'The mariner turns to his rest evermore;
'What will then be the answer the helmsman must give?
'Will it be . . . "Lo our log-book! Thus once did we live
'In the zones of the South; thus we traversed the seas
'Of the Orient; there dwelt in the Hesperides:
'Thence follow'd the west wind; here eastward we turn'd;

'The stars fail'd us there; just here land we discern'd
On our lee; there the storm overtook us at last;
That day went the bowsprit, the next day the mast;
'There the mermen came round us, and there we saw bask
'A syren?" The Captain of Port will he ask
'Any one of such questions? I cannot think so!
'But..."What is the last Bill of Health you can show?"
'Not — How fared the soul through the trials she pass'd?
'But — What is the state of that soul at the last?'

'May it be so!' he sigh'd. 'There! the sun drops, behold!'
And indeed, whilst he spoke all the purple and gold
In the west had turn'd ashen, save one fading strip
Of light that yet gleam'd from the dark nether lip
Of a long reef of cloud; and o'er sullen ravines
And ridges the raw damps were hanging white screens
Of melancholy mist.
'*Nunc dimittis!*' she said.
'O God of the living! whilst yet 'mid the dead
'And the dying we stand here alive, and thy days
'Returning, admit space for prayer and for praise,
'In both these confirm us!
'The helmsman, Eugène,
'Needs the compass to steer by. Pray always. Again
'We two part: each to work out Heaven's will: you, I trust,
'In the world's ample witness; and I, as I must,
'In secret and silence: you, love, fame, await;
Me, sorrow and sickness. We meet at one gate
When all 's over. The ways they are many and wide,

'And seldom are two ways the same. Side by side
'May we stand at the same little door when all 's done!
'The ways they are many, the end it is one.
'He that knocketh shall enter: who asks shall obtain:
'And who seeketh, he findeth. Remember, Eugène!'
She turn'd to depart.
'Whither? whither?'.... he said.
She stretch'd forth her hand where, already outspread
On the darken'd horizon, remotely they saw
The French camp-fires kindling.
'O Duc de Luvois,
'See yonder vast host, with its manifold heart
'Made as one man's by one hope! That hope 't is your part
'To aid towards achievement, to save from reverse:
'Mine, through suffering to soothe, and through sickness to nurse.
'I go to my work: you to yours.'

XXXVIII.

Whilst she spoke,
On the wide wasting evening there distantly broke
The low roll of musketry. Straightway, anon,
From the dim Flag-staff Battery bellow'd a gun.
'Our chasseurs are at it!' he mutter'd.
She turn'd,
Smiled, and pass'd up the twilight.
He faintly discern'd
Her form, now and then, on the flat lurid sky
Rise, and sink, and recede through the mists: by and by
The vapours closed round, and he saw her no more.

XXXIX.

Nor shall we. For her mission, accomplish'd, is
o'er.
The mission of genius on earth! To uplift,
Purify, and confirm by its own gracious gift,
The world, in despite of the world's dull endeavour
To degrade, and drag down, and oppose it forever.
The mission of genius: to watch, and to wait,
To renew, to redeem, and to regenerate.
The mission of woman on earth! to give birth
To the mercy of Heaven descending on earth.
The mission of woman: permitted to bruise
The head of the serpent, and sweetly infuse,
Through the sorrow and sin of earth's register'd
curse,
The blessing which mitigates all: born to nurse,
And to soothe, and to solace, to help and to heal
The sick world that leans on her. This was Lucile.

XL.

A power hid in pathos: a fire veil'd in cloud:
Yet still burning outward: a branch which, tho'
bow'd
By the bird in its passage, springs upward again:
Thro' all symbols I search for her sweetness — in
vain!
Judge her love by her life. For our life is but
love
In act. Pure was hers: and the dear God above,
Who knows what His creatures have need of for
life,
And whose love includes all loves, thro' much
patient strife
Led her soul into peace. Love, tho' love may be
given
In vain, is yet lovely. Her own native heaven
She saw dawn clear and clearer, as life's troubled
dream

Wore away; and love sigh'd into rest, like a stream
That breaks its heart over wild rocks toward the shore
Of the great sea which hushes it up evermore
With its little wild wailing. No stream from its source
Flows seaward, how lonely soever its course,
But what some land is gladden'd. No star ever rose
And set, without influence somewhere. Who knows
What earth needs from earth's lowest creature? No life
Can be pure in its purpose and strong in its strife
And all life not be purer and stronger thereby.
The spirits of just men made perfect on high,
The army of martyrs who stand by the Throne
And gaze into the Face that makes glorious their own,
Know this, surely, at last. Honest love, honest sorrow,
Honest work for the day, honest hope for the morrow,
Are these worth nothing more than the hand they make weary,
The heart they have sadden'd, the life they leave dreary?
Hush! the sevenfold heavens to the voice of the Spirit
Echo: He that o'ercometh shall all things inherit.

XLI.

The moon was, in fire, carried up through the fog;
The loud fortress bark'd at her like a chain'd dog.
The horizon pulsed flame, the air sound. All without,
War and winter, and twilight, and terror, and doubt;

All within, light, warmth, calm!
In the twilight, longwhile
Eugène de Luvois with a deep thoughtful smile
Linger'd, looking, and listening, lone by the tent.
At last he withdrew, and night closed as he went.

THE END

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